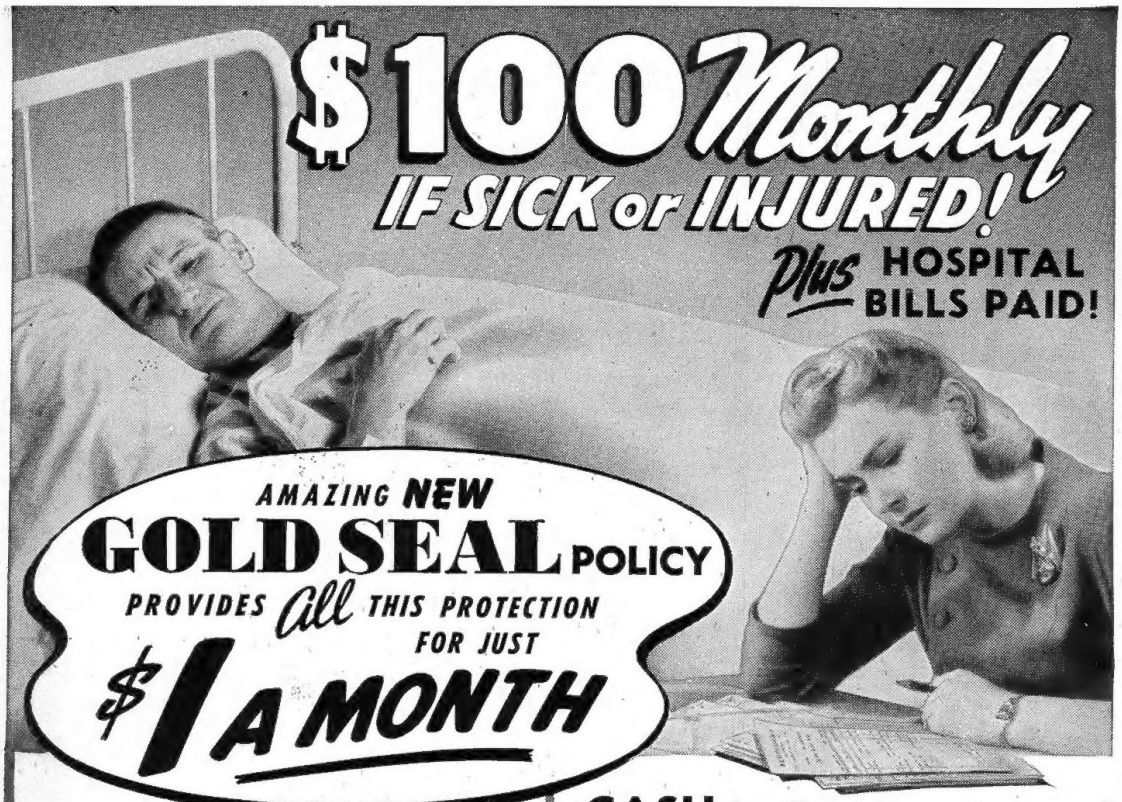
North·West
STORIES OF THE WILDERNESS FRONTIER
ROMANCES
FALL
10¢
FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES
TRADE MARK REG.
SATAN'S TIMBER-CLAIM
by SONST HAGEN
GIRL OF THE WHITE WATER TRAIL
A Big Complete Novel of the Alaska Fiords
by DAN CUSHMAN



$100 Monthly IF SICK or INJURED!

Plus HOSPITAL BILLS PAID!

AMAZING NEW

GOLD SEAL POLICY

PROVIDES All THIS PROTECTION FOR JUST

$1 A MONTH

CASH BENEFITS BIG ENOUGH To Be WORTHWHILE!

SICKNESS BENEFITS! Policy pays for loss of time due to sickness, a regular monthly income for as long as 3 months, up to..... **$100.00 PER MO.**

ACCIDENT BENEFITS! Policy pays for *accident disability* at rate up to $100 per month, for as long as 24 months, or **$2400.00**

ACCUMULATED CASH! Policy pays for accidental loss of life, limb or sight up to $4,000, accumulated to..... **$6000.00**

PLUS SICKNESS, ACCIDENT and MATERNITY HOSPITALIZATION PLAN

Policy pays "hospitalization benefits" for *sickness, accident* or *maternity*, including hospital room at rate of $5.00 per day, operating room, anaesthesia, drugs, dressings, laboratory, X-ray, oxygen tent and other services, *even ambulance service*. Total hospital benefits as specified to over..... **$650.00**

The SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE CO.
729-A Service Life Building OMAHA 2, NEBRASKA

CASH for Almost Every Emergency!

Now, added millions can afford all-around insurance protection. Here is a combination SICKNESS, ACCIDENT & HOSPITALIZATION policy *for just a dollar a month* that pays in strict accordance with its provisions for ANY and ALL accidents, ALL the common sicknesses, even non-confining illness and minor injuries. It pays disability benefits from the very first day. NO *waiting period!* NO this is *not* the usual "limited" policy. It's an extra-liberal policy that provides quick cash to *replace lost income*, pay *doctor* and *hospital bills*, for *medicines* and other pressing demands for cash that invariably come when sickness or accident strikes.

POLICY ISSUED *By Mail* AT BIG SAVINGS!

NO MEDICAL EXAMINATION!

Ages 15 to 69. Actual policy sent by mail for 10 Days Free Examination. NO cost! NO obligation! NO salesman will call! See this policy and judge for yourself. It's the protection you need and should have at a price you *can* afford. Just mail coupon below! But *do it today*. Tomorrow might be too late!

FREE 10-DAY INSPECTION COUPON

The SERVICE LIFE INSURANCE CO.
729-A Service Life Bldg., Omaha 2, Nebraska

SEND without cost or obligation your extra-liberal "Gold Seal" $1-A-MONTH Policy for 10 Days' Free Inspection.

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....AGE.....

CITY.....STATE.....

BENEFICIARY.....

REG. U. S. PAT. OFF.

North West ROMANCES

T. T. SCOTT, President
JACK O'SULLIVAN, Editor
MALCOLM REISS, Gen. Mgr.

(AUG.-OCT.)

Vol. XV, No. 10 FALL ISSUE, 1946 20c per copy

A BIG COMPLETE NOVEL

GIRL OF THE WHITE WATER TRAIL . . . Dan Cushman 2
He scorned the weak. He broke the strong. Brynne Keefe was Power—hard-fisted ruler of the silver salmon empire. And it was not until he made his brag against Fate that he knew terror in the dread scourge of a victim's hate . . . and the smashing force of a woman's fury.

THREE THUNDERING NORTHLAND NOVELETS

KNIGHT IN BUCKSKIN . . . . . Harrison McElwaine 46
"D'Aulnay!" The hated name was on every lip of Fort La Tour's small band of defenders—and their courage was helping to brighten the blackest page in the Fair History of Acadia.

SATAN'S TIMBER CLAIM . . . . . Sonst Hagen 76
The young cruiser's job was cut out for him—whip the Devil-jinx of Loon Lake's prize timber stand.

MOUNTIE ON THE PROD . . . . . Tom O'Neill 104
The law of the wilderness is harsh. Would Corporal McGrath chance the full fury of its sting . . . forget his oath . . . for the lips of a she-devil?

THREE THRILLING WILDERNESS SHORT STORIES

JINX CAMP . . . . . C. Hall Thompson 34
Brig Sutton's rep was withering under the cross-fire of Lady Luck.

THE GREAT HUNGER . . . . . John Starr 97
Hunger, and a pretty, slant-eyed breed girl can turn sane men into trail wolves.

WINDY BILL . . . . . John Beames 69
The unfortunate part about Windy Bill was that he could fight as well as he could talk.

A PAIR OF NORTHLAND FEATURES

WOLVES CAN BE TOUGH . . . . . C. V. Tench 65
A true account of terror and death with the marauding timber wolf.

The Pig War . . . . . Walter Galli 103
One of the most fascinating stories to come out of the Northwest. A picture page.

NORTHWEST ROMANCES: Published quarterly by Glen-Kel Publishing Co., Inc., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y. Copyright 1946 by Glen-Kel Publishing Co. All rights reserved. Reentered as second class matter, April 24, 1943, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879. Subscription rate for U. S. A., $0.80 yearly. This is a magazine of fiction; the characters named and incidents described do not refer to any actual person. While due care is always exercised, the publishers will not be responsible for the return of unsolicited manuscripts. For advertising rates address—ADVERTISING DIRECTOR, FICTION HOUSE, INC., 670 Fifth Ave., New York 19, N. Y.

Printed in U. S. A.

Girl of the White Water Trail

By DAN CUSHMAN

Alone, Brynne Keefe dominated the fertile fishing grounds, a hard-fisted ruler of the silver salmon empire. He scorned the weak. He broke the strong. He was Power. It was not until he made his brag against Fate that he knew terror in the dread scourge of a man's shame . . . and the smashing force of a woman's fury.

Northwest Romances' Feature Novel

THE STEAMBOAT Mary Gaddes hesitated at Cape March to take on a pilot before heading into the reef-filled waters of Tuya Inlet. Winter mist, like strips of torn gray crepe, drifted down from the illimitible spruce forests of the

Alaskan coast, and the Mary Gaddes moaned her whistle to warm off stray halibut trollers as she groped her way through the dishwater sea.

A short man, leaning on the rail, growled:

"Why in hell didn't they build the town back on the cape?"

He wasn't actually speaking to anyone, but the tall, clean-limbed young man standing next to him answered,

"Don't blame the people who built Ketchanka. Blame the salmon. You never know what course they'll take through these islands, but they run strong along the shore farther in. That's why the canneries were built up there."

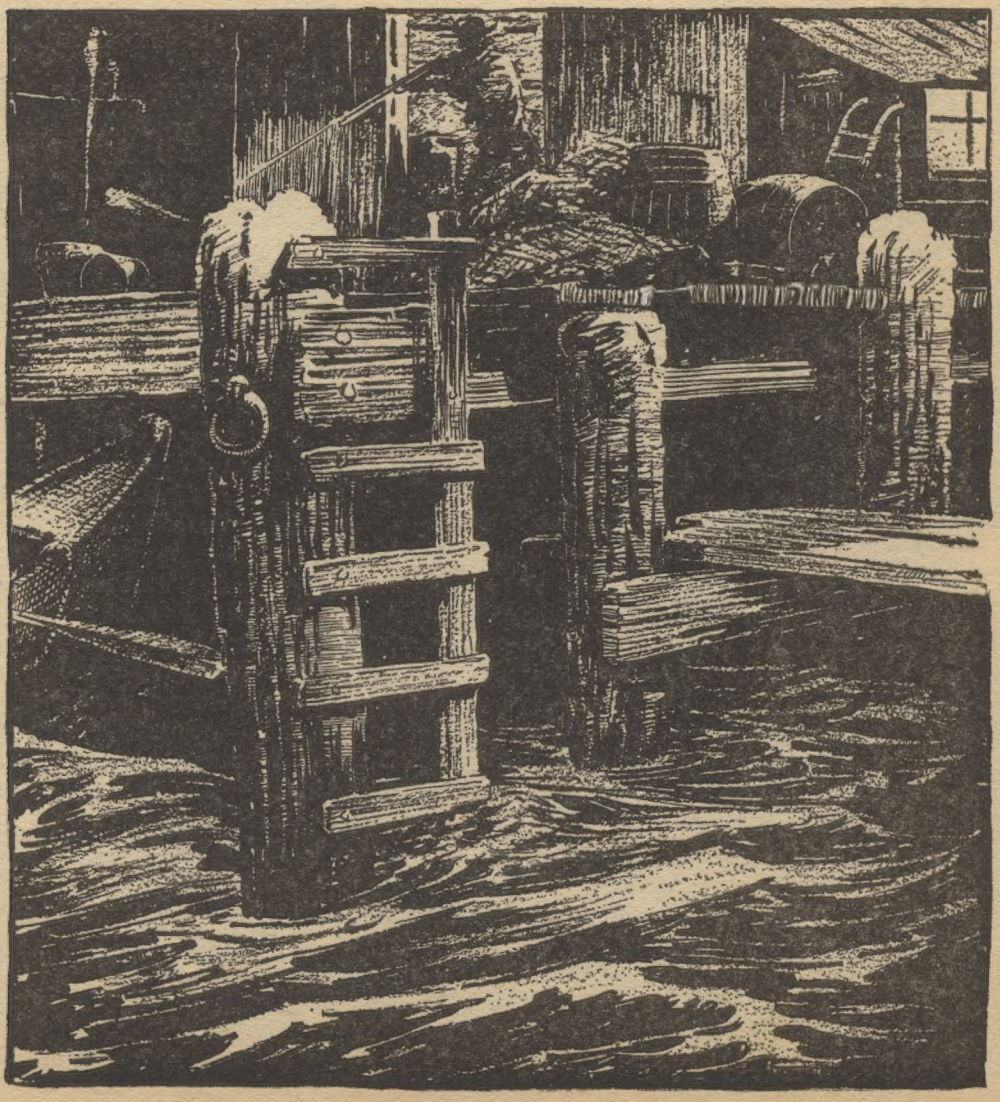
"You seem to be acquainted here."

The young man nodded. For some reason, these words, intended as an opening wedge for conversation, had the opposite effect. He drew his lips tight in silence as he looked across the cold sea.

Yes, Tim Calloway was acquainted. After four years, he was going home—to Ketchanka, scene of his family's glory, and its desolation.

Tim Calloway was going back to renew old acquaintances. Especially *one* old acquaintance. He was going back to even a score with Brynne Keefe—"King Salmon Keefe," as he was known to every Swede seiner, bohunk trap man, and gut-fingered Chink that made his living in the Alaskan fish business.

Gunfire whanged out from the shanty doorway, cutting the night with a yellow powder trail.



The forested line of Dog Island slipped past to starboard, and the Mary Gaddes heeled over a trifle as she swung to miss the Blunderbobs—a set of rocks over which the ingoing tide rushed with a streak of white froth.

The mist strung away. A headland moved past, and Tim Calloway's pulse quickened. In a moment now he would see the red, sheet-metal roof of Gallway, his father's old cannery. There would be a level stretch of coast, and five miles farther the extensive buildings of the Alaska-Blue Star Company, the smaller docks of Olson Packing, and finally the town of Ketchanka lying in three terraces along the hillside.

For the moment he forgot the desire for revenge that had pulled him back to this place. He seemed to be a boy again. In his imagination he once more stood with his father on the deck of the old steam auxiliary Norcoss, arriving well ahead of the supply ship to ready Gallway for the season's salmon run.

THE headland moved by, and there was Gallway—the same sheet-metal roofs, the China shacks, the floating dock covered with ice. A little older, perhaps, but still the same. As the boat swung farther around the point, his eye fell on something that caused him to stiffen. There was a couple of floating fish traps, each bearing the blue and white six-point star of Alaska-Blue Star, raising their criss-cross superstructures from Cabbage Point.

"What's the matter, son?" asked the short man.

"Those traps with the blue stars—they're on Calloway fishing grounds."

"Not any more, I reckon. The Calloways are gone. Old Pat's dead. That no-good son of his that quarreled with him shipped as a common sailor. You can bet King Salmon Keefe ain't the kind to let good trap locations go to waste after they're abandoned."

"That one's not abandoned."

"No?"

"No. I have it on good authority that his no-good son is on his way back to take over!"

The salmon season was still a considerable distance away, but there were enough halibut trollers tied at Ketchanka's docks to make a considerable racket with horns and whistles when the Mary Gaddes came in sight and plowed the four-mile stretch of deep water to her moorings at the Northern Transportation dock.

Tim stood there, his dufflbag beside him, looking over the crowd which had gathered. They were winterers mainly, for those birds of passage, the salmon laborers, were still being rounded up from the flophouses and Chinatowns of Vancouver, Seattle and San Francisco. There were many faces among these winterers that Tim recognized —faces from Fish Alley, from Cutler Street, and from the mansions of Nob Hill, all rubbing shoulders in this single group.

Brynne Keefe was not there.

In a way, Tim was relieved. Although he had had four months to think about it —all the way from Singapore to Frisco, and here—he still did not know what he would do when he met Brynne Keefe face to face.

He tossed his duffle over his supple shoulder and strode down the plank.

He was lithe and strong in his movements. He was not handsome, but there was something about his square jaw, his snub nose, and his cool, sea-green eyes that made women pause and look at him —women from the line on Fish Alley, and salmon duchesses from the mansions on Nob Hill.

Their eyes were on him now, but if he noticed he gave no sign. He walked straight on, carrying his heavy dufflebag as though it were filled with straw. He headed directly for a huge Norwegian and dropped his duffle a step or two away.

"Yah?" asked the Norseman.

"Don't you recognize me, Olaf?"

Olaf reared up straight at sound of the voice, "By golly, aye know those Calloway voice anywhere! Tim Calloway, sure enough! Aye skal tell them damn Blue Star seiners, 'You wait! Tim Calloway coom back. Maybe he have pocket full green money, too. Maybe he start up Gallway.' One big year with salmon run like old day—one big pack, yah, and old Gallway skal show those Alaska-Blue Star bloodsuckers, by yingos! You have plenty money, yah?"

"I've got about twenty dollars."

Olaf cursed in Norwegian. "Yah, aye bane yust damn fool. Aye t'ink the old

days coom back. Aye close my eyes and see Gallway seiners dump tons fish. Just like silver in summer sun. Aye see trap spiller full. Aye hear old cannery line clamp-clamp like old days, but—"

"I'll open Gallway, Olaf."

Olaf shook his head sadly. His huge hands, brittle, and turned hard as horse's hoof from salt water, dropped in surrender.

"No. You bane young. You have big dream. But Olaf has seen! Olaf knows no broke man can beat Brynne Keefe and those damn Blue Star people."

"My father got here broke."

"Yah."

Big Olaf said just that one word, but its meaning was plain. He did not consider Tim the equal of his father. Olaf had been his father's foreman for fifteen years. When Tim quarreled with his father, Olaf had taken the old man's part, but afterward he almost got himself fired trying to smooth it over.

"Where is he buried, Olaf?"

"Old Pat? Aye don't know. Nobody know. In those cold gray sea, aye guess. He go out to fight those Blue Star pirate and yust never coom back."

"Is Brynne Keefe around town?"

"Yah." He reached a massive hand to Tim's shoulder. "Aye don't think you better see Brynne Keefe. Aye tank you better wait. You better think."

"Where does he hang out?"

"You skal—"

"I asked where he hung out."

"Yah. You bane like your old father. Aye never could argue with him, neither. You know Silver Salmon Hotel? Aye guess she's built since you left. Every dinner time almost he coom down there. Brynne, and his boy, Tallant, and Tallant's girl, that Miss Hartman—by jimminy, she's pretty like anything—"

"Is the Silver Salmon up on Cutler Street?"

"Yah. Don't you start no trouble now—"

"I'll see you at the wharf tomorrow morning. We'll take a run out to Gallway."

THE Silver Salmon was a two-story log structure fragrant of freshly sawed spruce. Inside, on the first floor, was one of those hotel dining and drinking rooms typical of frontier Alaska.

Two men were shaking dice at a small bar in one corner of the room while the bartender, a former pug named Kid Mundt, served as referee.

One of the men was a skipper of a halibut troller. He was fresh from the sea, still wearing his hip boots. The other was a small cannery operator by the name of Jack Queens.

Queens looked at Tim for a moment as though trying to recall his face. It was something of a shock when Queens failed to recognize him. Four years is not long—but in Tim's instance it was the difference between being a boy and a man.

Kid Mundt set out a bottle and glass as a matter of course. Tim tossed down a twenty-dollar gold piece, and Kid Mundt made change without taking his eyes from the dice cubes.

Tim dribbled a few drops of liquor into the glass, and stood looking around the room. There was a kitchen with a swinging door and a peep-hole, half a dozen tables along the far wall. In democratic frontier Alaska, such places were common domain for men and women, and for all classes.

"Brynne Keefe been around?" he asked.

Kid Mundt looked up, his eyes dull and piglike between his big cauliflower ears. He acted like he'd just a little rather look at a man's pedigree before telling him about the great Keefe.

"No," he finally answered. "But he'll be here, I suppose."

Jack Queens was looking at him again. Tim smiled to himself, wondering if the man would recognize him at all. He'd have introduced himself if it hadn't been for the others. He didn't want to advertise his arrival. It wouldn't have surprised him if Keefe owned an interest in the Silver Salmon, and this has-been pug was one of his strong boys.

"I understand Tallant's in town," remarked the halibuter.

Queens nodded. Tallant was Keefe's only son. Tim had known him as a handsome, irresponsible boy there in Ketchanka.

Tim strolled over to a table by the wall where he could watch the entire room. Jack Queens finished his dice and walked across toward Tim's chair. He was a small man, this Jack Queens, but there was something about him that indicated power.

"You're Tim Calloway," he said with a level look from his gray eyes.

"I wondered if you'd recognize me," Tim said, standing to shake hands.

"You've changed, lad. You've changed a whole hell of a lot. When you left here you were a kid with a deck of cards where your brain should have been. But you're a man now."

"I'll try to act like one."

"Forget it—what I said about the cards. Hell, we all make mistakes—your dad as well as anyone. He wanted you awful bad after they got him crowded to the wall."

"Brynne Keefe got him, didn't he?"

Jack Queens shrugged. "Your dad knew what he was up against. Keefe had him where he wanted him and made an offer. Your dad told him to go to hell. The salmon run was poor here in the inlet, but the traps along the shore were doing well. He thought they'd pull him through, but Keefe was ahead of him. He had a dozen seiners out there pirating the fish. There was a tip came through that Keefe was going to lift that Cape Main trap, and your dad and four Swedes went out to stop him. They were never heard of again."

"And Keefe?"

"Keefe was inside this very room when it happened. Hell, lad, he hires the dirty work done for him."

"I heard they fought here in the street."

"Your dad and Keefe? Sure. They fought with their fists, but Keefe was too young. What do you plan when Keefe comes in?"

"I don't know." It was the truth. He still hadn't decided.

Queens reached beneath Tim's coat and lifted the six shooter that he carried there in a halfbreed holster. "Not this, son."

"Keefe killed my—"

"Draw this and you'll go out through the door feet first. They don't call him King Salmon for nothing."

There was a brittle note in Tim's voice when he asked, "What would you have me do—put my tail between my legs and take the next boat outside?"

"No. Not that. You can stay and fight along on a shoestring. You still have Gallway. It's as much as I have, even if it is mortgaged. Yes, I'm still running my little one-line cannery down by the mission. Five traps, a seiner and a tender. The run is spotty there, but I get by. I won't pretend I'm too tough for Keefe. Just too small. He hasn't bothered with me yet. I expect an offer from him this year, however."

"And then what?"

"Why, I'll take it—" Queens pointed a finger at his temple and crooked his thumb like a gun hammer falling "—or else. By the way, your dad *did* will you what was left, didn't he?"

Tim nodded. He had a mortgaged cannery, a string of excellent trapsites with the traps washed away, and an old Victorian house upon Nob Hill.

He asked, "Are you going to take that offer when he makes it?"

"I haven't—quite—decided."

Jack Queens leaned back, holding his whisky glass with the liquor untouched, looking at Tim Calloway. He appraised his fine shoulders, his lithe waist, the strong cut of his features. He wondered about the spirit beneath. He wondered if it was the fighting spirit of old Pat Calloway—a spirit that had taken a few hundred spruce poles, some second-hand webbing, and with these had built a salmon empire equal to the Nortland's best.

The room filled up as dinner time approached. Half a dozen men were at the bar. A merchant came in with his wife and daughter. They ordered dinner, and sat waiting.

There was a clatter outside the door—then a voice that sent a shock through Tim Calloway's body. It had been four years since he heard that voice—but there was no doubting it. It was the sonorous, well-modulated voice of Brynne Keefe.

II

TIM half rose and looked across the room beneath the gasoline hanging lamps. He expected to see Keefe come through that open door, but instead he was looking into the eyes of a girl.

She was not more than twenty, yet in spite of her youth, and her slim loveliness, there was something mature and certain about her, as though she had been given wisdom beyond mere years. She met Tim's eyes, and she half smiled. It was as though somewhere they had met before.

With an effort, the girl took her eyes

from Tim and turned to say something to the people who followed.

A tall, good looking woman of thirty-five came in, next Tallant Keefe wearing the football emblem of the University of Washington, and after him, suave, massive and straight as one of the great cedar trees of the coastal forests—Brynne Keefe.

They walked across to a table that was set for them. Keefe paused behind the chair of the elder woman, waiting for her to drop her black fox wrap from her shoulders.

"That's Gertrude Lovilard — of the stage," said Queens. "Mrs. Keefe now. The first one divorced him, you know."

Tim nodded. He noticed that Tallant was bending over the younger woman. It irked him, though he felt no real hatred for Tallant as he did for his father.

Tim stood up.

"Take it easy, son," Queens said to him.

His action attracted the eyes of Brynne Keefe. Keefe moved suddenly in his chair. No one else had recognized Tim — but Keefe did. He stood on those mighty legs of his, and strode across the room.

"Hello, Calloway," he said.

Calloway! The name seemed to cut the air of the room, freezing conversation. The men at the bar stood with their drinks poised, staring.

Keefe did not glance to right or left. He seemed to be reading the temper of his man as he advanced.

Keefe smiled, showing his strong teeth. He had personality, and dominance. It stood out now. It suddenly made Tim feel small, although he came within a half-inch of Keefe's own height.

Keefe extended his hand—a powerful, well-formed hand. Like manicured steel. Tim ignored the hand, and thereby, without saying a word, delivered the supreme insult of the North country.

Keefe let his hand fall to his side and paused a step away, only the slight trembling of his eyelids telling the fury that consumed him. Never, in his years in the North, had a man refused his handshake. He knew everyone there had noticed and now were wondering what he would do. A man at the bar dropped a whisky glass. The sound of it, smashing against the rail, was like a rifle shot through the tense room. Tallant shifted in his chair, smiling curiously. The girl's eyebrows were pinched in a troubled frown.

Tim Calloway spoke, "Hello, Keefe." Then, in reference to the handshake, "There's no need of being hypocritcal."

"Why, that's right, Calloway. There's no use at all."

Keefe smiled a little, drawing his thin lips tight. He shifted a trifle from one foot to the other. "You've come here looking for it, haven't you?"

Tim started to answer, but with the unexpected speed of a striking copperhead, Keefe's fist lashed out.

Tim had no chance to catch the blow. No chance to ride with it. The fist connected with the force of a sledge, driving him back across a chair that collapsed into a heap of twisted rungs beneath his weight.

Ordinarily a fight in the Silver Salmon would have brought Kid Mundt around the bar with his sap, but with Keefe a party to it, the situation was different. Mundt merely stood there, staring.

Tim rolled over and found his way to one arm, shaking his head groggily. He made it back to his feet.

"You've had enough?" asked Keefe.

Tim did not answer. Instead he set himself and swung a looping left. Keefe dropped his head in time to take it high on the cheek.

THERE was a whiplash snap in the blow that rocked Keefe for a second. He recovered, set himself, and once more swung that sledgehammer right.

Tim took it and lashed back. It was exactly what Keefe expected. He doubled, ramming Tim with his hip, pivoted, and came up like a released trap spring, driving his elbow to the pit of Tim's stomach.

The blow was devastating. It would have taken the guts out of a weaker man. There was a chance that it might have beaten Tim Calloway, but Keefe, in the supreme fury of the moment, did not wait to see.

His hand flashed from the holster beneath his coat with a short-barrelled, heavy revolver.

Jack Queens leaped from his chair, shouting, "He's unarmed! I have—"

But Keefe did not intend to shoot. He held the gun in the palm of his hand, then, while Tim was still reeling, sick from the

stomach blow, Keefe drove the gun to the side of his skull.

Tim hit the floor on hands and knees. Blood oozed from the gun bruise and smeared across his cheek.

Keefe seemed to be fighting to hold himself back. Had he been in some other place he would have beaten in the skull of this pup who had insulted him, but he was in Ketchanka's best restaurant. His wife of three months was watching, so was his son, and Eva Hartman, his son's future wife . . .

So he balanced there, but his rage was too much for him. He leaped forward—

The concussion of a gun rocked the room. It made him stop at the crest of his swing. Jack Queens was facing him with a .45 calibre revolver leveled. A little flicker of dust arose where the bullet had torn the floor.

"Put it away, Keefe," Queens said, his voice calm.

Keefe started down with the gun as though he intended to use it anyway, but Tallant ran across the room and jerked him around.

"Dad, for God's sake! Use your head. You might have killed the poor fellow."

Brynne Keefe trembled a moment, then he was himself again—once more the master of his emotions.

"Nonsense, son. I was merely teaching him a lesson."

He turned and met the eyes of the women at his table. "It's nothing," he smiled. "Come, this is Alaska, you know."

His wife who had been Gertrude Lovillard of the stage grabbed up a bottle of cordial that had been waiting on the table and poured herself a stiff one. "Sweet Robert Fitzsimmons!" she muttered, downing it.

Eva Hartman stood beside her chair, staring at the bleeding form of Tim Calloway with fixed terror.

"Here, help me with him," Tallant said.

"You get the hell away," growled Jack Queens.

Tallant shrugged. "I was just trying to help."

"We don't need the help of any damned Keefe."

"The sins of the fathers!" smiled Tallant striding back to his table in a lighthearted manner. He said to the girl, "Why, I've always liked the bounder. Gone trouting with him a dozen times when we were kids. Say! what's the trouble, Eva? You look—"

"Take me home!"

"But come, this is dad's evening. You're not going to let a little—"

"Take me home!"

"Take her home, Tallant," said Brynne Keefe.

Tim Calloway sat in a chair by the wall and allowed Jack Queens to swab off his slit scalp. Aside from a little, buzzing headache, he didn't feel so bad. He watched Tallant Keefe help the girl put on her wrap. He noticed that her fingers trembled as she fastened the buttons.

"Good night, my dear," Brynne Keefe said, bowing with a slight inclination of his head.

Tim couldn't tell whether she answered him. She walked to the door with Tallant, then she paused and once more met Tim's eyes. He smiled a little, and to his surprise she gave him a smile in return.

"Eva Hartman, you say?" he asked.

"Yes. She came here with her uncle, James P. Hartman last year. He's U. S. Commissioner. Tallant came up from the States to reline his pockets out of the old man's bank account and hasn't left since. I hear it will be a June wedding."

"June," said Tim, "is a damned long way off."

"It's not too long if you're planning to put Gallway into operation."

"How about you? Are you going to sell when Keefe makes that offer?"

"I'll be damned if I will. Tim, I've been thinking it over, and I'd like mighty well to ride along with you."

"Partnership? You'd be getting the worst of it. What do I have? No cash, nothing but—"

"You have the finest cannery site on the coast of Alaska. You have the best trap locations. You have those, lad, through right of precedence, and the commissioner will have to protect you in it, no matter who's marrying his niece. Me—I have a little, one-line cannery in going condition. Neither of us could fight hard enough by ourselves to muss Keefe's hair, but together—well, I have lots of faith in that Calloway fighting spirit."

"Why, then it's a deal, Jack."

And there, beneath the eyes of Brynne Keefe, they shook hands on it.

THE buildings of Gallway were long, dim and dank. Expensive cannery machinery stood uncovered, gathering dust and corrosion. Tim spent most of next day poking around the old plant. Toward evening he went out to the floating wharf where his rowboat was tied. He was waiting for Olaf to come from his inspection of the fish elevator when he heard the put-put of a little outboard motor, and after a moment of looking located a boat cutting the chop-waves from the direction of Ketchanka.

The boat came straight to the float, the motor stopped, and the craft rubbed against the ice-crusted boards. He was surprised to see that the single occupant of the boat was a girl—Eva Hartman.

"I'm Eva Hartman," she said, smiling. She had been beautiful the night before, but she was even more beautiful now in her black slicker, and the sou'wester beneath which her dark hair fell in wavy profusion, sparkling with droplets of spray in the evening light.

"And I'm Tim Calloway," he answered.

"Yes, I know. I was out bounding around in my walnut shell and saw somebody over here, so I thought I'd wheel around to see who it was."

He knew well enough her coming had not been accident, but he did not let on.

There was an uncomfortable little pause. The girl stood near the edge of the float, a troubled frown gathering her eyebrows.

"I wanted to tell you I was sorry for what happened last night. I consider Mr. Keefe's treatment of you inexcusable."

Tim shrugged. "I would have treated him the same."

"No," she said simply, "you wouldn't." Then she added, "Tallant was sorry for what happened, too."

She didn't say anything about Tallant being her future husband, but he noticed the large, square-cut diamond solitaire on the third finger of her left hand.

"Tallant would like to be your friend," she added.

He wondered if Tallant had sent her out there. There was another pause, so he remarked,

"I was just going over the old place—seeing whether it was all here." He pointed at the trapsites over at Cabbage Point, "I see there are a couple of Blue Star floaters on my water. Either the Keefes or myself will have to move them some day."

He said it deliberately so she would carry the word back to Tallant, but as soon as the words had left his mouth he knew she would say nothing to him.

"I understood those trap sites had been abandoned."

"Did your uncle tell you that?"

"Yes," she said simply.

Olaf was still not in sight, so Tim showed her through the cannery. When they came out, twilight was settling. Their ears picked up the hum of a launch motor from the direction of Blue Star village.

Eva seemed to recognize the sound of that motor. It made her nervous. A searchlight swept the edge of the float and came to rest on the two of them standing there. A gray launch came in from the gloom, water roaring in its stern as the propeller was reversed.

A tall, graceful young man hopped out. The man was Tallant Keefe.

"Eva! you devil! So you ran out on me." He turned, smiling handsomely at Tim. "Tim, old man! I should carry on the family battle, and I would if you weren't such a capital fellow!"

Tallant's restless eyes sparkled while he talked. He seemed to have no hard feelings toward Tim.

"You'll never guess how I found out she followed you. The clerk at the Silver Salmon told me she came in there asking for Mr. Timothy Calloway. Imagine, asking for *you*, and starting a scandal. So, I put one and one together. Result, two! Then I came here."

Eva bit her underlip. It made her seem to be a fool after her story of just chancing to come along.

Tim said evenly, "I think Miss Hartman dislikes the idea of enmities existing. She thought maybe she could smooth it over."

She shot him a thankful glance. The explanation saved her in the eyes of both men—and after all it was about half true.

Tallant said, "Tim, I don't like it either. Let me say I didn't care for dad's treatment of you. Lord, man! The person never came north of fifty-four that could stand

up against the fists of my father. He shouldn't have let you had it quite as hard as he did."

"You're a considerate lad, Tallant," Tim answered, dryly.

"Sure. He shouldn't have bashed you like that. I'd hate to trade punches with him myself, and I dare say I'd be a match for you. I was in the national A.A.U. heavyweight semi-finals, you know." Tallant was not above spreading his feathers for Eva. He swaggered a little, for not every young man is the scion of a salmon king like Brynne Keefe. "Tim, we were always good friends in the old days. I told Eva when I kissed her goodnight—"

"Tallant!"

"Oh come, now, girl! I believe it's customary for a fellow to kiss his future wife goodnight!"

She had not referred to her engagement to Tallant. Tim could tell that it irked her when Tallant mentioned it. He wondered why, not imagining that his own cleanly formed face and honest eyes might have anything to do with it.

TALLANT went on, "Listen, now. I'm not horning in on your business, Tim. I don't know why you came here, why you were talking with Jack Queens, or why you are out looking at this rust heap tonight. But if you're planning to buck my dad and cut him out of part of this season's salmon run, for God's sakes get the idea out of your head. He's mad as a hornet already. If you try to open Gallway, he'll slap you into the sea. I tried to argue with him this morning—stuck up for you just for old time's sake, but it didn't do a bit of good—"

"Thanks, Tallant. You're considerate. But I'll take measures for my own safety."

"Fine! I thought you'd come around to my way of thinking. Tell you what, Tim. I'll talk to him again and see if I can get him to make you a good, generous offer for this cannery. After all—"

"Have him make it an *extremely* good offer, Tallant!" Tim said, his eyes bright from the humor of the situation.

"I will. That is—"

"Because Gallway is *not* for sale."

"Tim, for—"

"And while you're talking to him, tell him to get those fish traps off my water over on Cabbage Point or he'll wake up some morning and find them riding the tide out by Cape March."

The exuberance drained from Tallant's manner. He stood straight and handsome, looking at Tim with mingled curiosity and admiration. It was such a look as a visitor might give to a madman who showed signs of genius.

"Tim. I have to hand it to you. You have nerve. You're a fool, but you have nerve. I dread to think what's going to happen to you." He turned, laughing to himself, and held out his hand for Eva. "Come, my wandering princess! Hop aboard. We mustn't make the pater wait dinner for us."

Big Olaf came out and stood watching as the launch pulled away.

"Aye think you bane talk too much, Tim. Now ol' Pat, he don't say nothin' he won't do, and—"

"You mean what I said about the traps? Hell, Olaf, you wouldn't expect me to cut them loose without warning, would you?"

"Yumpin yeehosophat!" Olaf whacked his salt-crusted pants and roared, "By yimminy, you *would* cut them trap loose. Aye tank we skal have geude fight!"

III

A COUPLE of days later Tim Calloway was directing a crew of winterers in their task of oil-polishing the iron chinks and other machinery at Gallway, when an Aleut came over to deliver a message. It was from James P. Hartman asking him to call that evening to discuss a matter of importance.

Tim paddled over to Ketchanka, arriving shortly after dark. He tied his skiff under the public dock and climbed the hatch which led directly to that portion of town known as Fish Alley.

Fish Alley was a double line of shacks and dives, fairly quiet now, but hell on wheels when the hordes of unruly cannery laborers arrived in the latter part of spring.

Someone had mushed in from the back country with a string of malemutes which were resting on their bellies, blocking the way. Tim started to circle them, and in so doing almost ran against Tallant Keefe.

Tallant had been drinking, and on his arm was one of the gals from the Red Feather honkeytonk.

Tim would have spoken and walked on, but Tallant collared him,

"Tim, you won't say anything about this if you happen to see Eva!"

"Of course not. What do you take me for?"

Tim went on up the alley, past gambling houses, and saloons, and honkeytonks until he passed the last scattering buildings and sighted the government house sitting on a rocky eminance surrounded by dark, pendant-branched hemlocks. He mounted the stone steps, and was shown to Hartman's office by an old Chinese in thick-soled slippers.

Hartman stood up to greet him. He was a distinguished-looking man, white haired, with straight, thin lips.

"Calloway! I'm glad to know you. Knew your father, and I can see the family resemblance. Yes indeed!"

Hartman sat down and kept nervously opening and closing his glass case.

"Ah—Calloway, it has come to my attention that you are threatening to destroy certain salmon traps that are owned by Alaska-Blue Star. Now, previous to my coming here, there was considerable, well, rough stuff, and—"

"Whoever told you I intended to destroy Blue Star property was misinformed."

"Oh?" said Hartman, lifting his eyebrows.

"Yes. It just happened that Blue Star trespassed on Gallway fishing grounds. They towed a couple of floating traps to Cabbage Point and anchored them there. I consider them abandoned property. I intend to cut them free with the tide to make room for traps of my own."

Hartman looked serious, snapping his glasses case harder than before. "Ah—Calloway. The way you describe your act makes little difference. Aren't you, by the act of cutting these traps free, actually destroying Alaska-Blue Star property just as I said?"

Tim smiled, "I believe that is something the United States courts will have to decide."

Hartman slammed the case down on his desk. "Are you threatening to carry the case over my head even before hearing my judgment on the matter?"

"Yes. Because I can tell right now what your judgment will be."

"You think I'm going to tell you Cabbage Point is Blue Star grounds through abandonment?"

"You can't, because my father fished on it last year. You are going to take the matter under advisement and investigate. While you're investigating, Blue Star will pack the Cabbage Point run."

Tim knew by the flush of anger which mounted in Hartman's face that he had guessed correctly.

"I warn you, Calloway, if you cut those traps loose—"

"Was that all Keefe asked you to see me about?" Tim asked, rising to go.

"Leave my office!" cried Hartman, pointing to the door with a trembling finger.

Tim nodded and stepped out just as Eva was coming down the stairs.

It was quite dark, but he could see her by the slim shadow she made. A ray of light from somewhere brought to life a needle-sharp reflection from the ring on her left hand.

"Tim! Was it about Cabbage Point?"

"Yes."

"You're angry because I told him?"

"Why should I be? I mentioned it intentionally to bring it to Keefe's attention. I don't like to strike without warning."

"You mean you thought I'd carry it to Keefe?"

"Hold on! I thought no such thing. I told it to Tallant—remember?"

A picture of Tallant flashed up as he had seen him a few minutes before—full of "moose milk" with a hussy on his arm. He felt suddenly sorry for this girl. Tallant would be a hell of a husband.

Eva walked with him to the front door. She paused there, as though she did not want him to leave so soon.

"I'm sorry I told uncle. I thought he would see you were in the right."

"Then *you* think I'm in the right?"

"Of course I do."

THEY heard the slap-slap of Chinese slippers, and the old houseman came as far as the bend of the hall, holding a lamp aloft.

"Ho!" he said, retreating when he saw the two of them there.

He was gone, but not so quickly that Tim failed to notice the ring gone from Eva's finger.

"Why did you take off your ring?" he asked.

She moved with sudden, guilty surprise.

"The ring?"

"You had it on when you came down the stairs."

She stood very still, her head bent. Her masses of dark, waving hair well over her shoulders. It was fragrant of salt breeze and evergreen.

"You didn't feel that you could wear the ring and be honest with yourself?" he asked.

"What do you mean?"

He did not answer. Instead, he reached out and closed his hands on her shoulders. She seemed almost fragile. She made no move to free herself. Suddenly, with an impulsive movement, he drew her close to him. She fought to free herself, but his strength made her efforts seem puny. He held her close for a moment, then he bent and kissed her on the lips.

A feeling of shame swept over him. He started to release her—then he realized she was not fighting against him any more. She was clinging to him, her cheek pressed against the front of his rough, woolen shirt.

She looked up and whispered his name. She pronounced it differently than before—a new meaning in her voice. The sensation of hearing it was warm and electric. He started to say something, but he heard Hartman moving around in his office. The girl started guiltily.

"Please go. If he sees us it would only cause trouble."

"Promise me one thing."

"What?"

"Promise that you won't wear that ring again."

"I promise!"

"I'll see you—"

"You hadn't better come here."

"But—"

"I'll come to you, at Gallway. Tomorrow. I take a spin every day on the inlet."

He opened the door and went outside. It was frosty with a breeze coming from the great snowfields of the Coastal Range, but he walked all the way to the public docks before he noticed that his cap was rolled up and stuffed in his pocket.

He found Jack Queens' boat tied up beside his, so instead of going back to Gallway, he climbed the hill to the Silver Salmon. Jack Queens was there, as he expected, getting his evening exercise with the dice box.

In a few minutes Brynne Keefe came in with a stranger dressed in his "Seattle clothes." Keefe passed by without glancing at Tim, escorting his guest to a private room in the rear. An hour or so passed when a babble of excited voices sounded from the street.

The door was booted open unceremoniously, and Tallant Keefe strode in with a dozen men at his heels.

The men were from Fish Alley, mostly—the type who would fasten themselves on anybody with money to spend for booze. In Tallant's case, they had evidently been promised a little excitement, too.

Tallant paused, getting his eyes used to the light. He'd been drinking enough to heighten the natural arrogance of his nature, but he was not drunk.

"Well, so *there* you are!" He walked up to Tim with a fine, muscular swing of his shoulders.

"What do you want, Tallant?"

INSTEAD of answering the question directly, Tallant pointed to him and said, "There's the brave cannery operator! Look at him! I tried to save his hide because I felt sorry for him—and what did he do? He saw me coming across the street with a Venus from down in Fish Alley, and ran right straight and told Eva Hartman about—"

"Don't mention Eva's name again!"

The words were not spoken loudly, but they had a quality that cut like a saw through Tallant's denunciation.

"Now he tells me I can't even mention her name—"

"Tallant—" started Kid Mundt.

"Stay back there where you belong, ears!" The Fish Alley crowd snickered at this reference to Kid Mundt's cauliflowers. "I'm going to tell this would-be cannery-man what he is."

Tallant thereupon proceeded to mouth a string of vile names.

"Keep still!" Tim held his temper. "I don't like to pop a drunken man."

"I'll show you how drunk I am!"

Tallant weaved swiftly forward, lashing with his left hand.

He was a college athlete. He had fought with his boxing team in the Olympic eliminations, and he knew how to handle himself. But Tim had had a training of a sort, too, although his college had been the forecastle of a steam auxiliary on the Oriental run, and his opponents, recruited from the waterfronts of the world, had heard of Harvard, Yale and Notre Dame nowhere except in the football lotteries.

So, when that left snaked out with a snap developed by punching the light bag, Tim rode with it, countered, shifted, and came over with a right that shook Tallant's teeth.

Tallant was put on his heels for a second. He tried to bob low and come up with a left hook. He made the mistake of telegraphing the move. He bent, but Tim followed him down with an overhand right.

Tallant sprawled on the floor. He reeled up, pawing with his left hand. Tim brushed it away, hesitated a fraction of a second for timing, and delivered a right-hand blow that smashed Tallant to the floor.

He whirled in time to face Kid Mundt who was running around the end of the bar with his sap.

Mundt had been a pug, although never a very good one, and he was too fat now. He saw the fist on its way as he hesitated there, his sap lifted high. He tried to retreat, but it was too late. He went down as though struck by a pike pole.

Brynne Keefe had heard the excitement in his private room. He hurried out and drew up sharply at the sight of his son sprawled cheek down among the cigar stubs on the floor. He turned and looked at Tim, his face draining of color.

"You were afraid of me, so you picked on my son!"

His voice was brittle as broken ice.

Tim answered, "Your son came here looking for it, and he found it. Why don't you take him home?"

It was evident that Keefe considered Tallant a moral weakling, so Tim took a primitive delight in saying the words which could only add to his fury.

"You're ashamed of him, aren't you?"

Keefe started forward, and then he seemed to realize that Tim was trying to egg him on and resume the battle where it had been left off a few nights before.

"Why don't you have that hoodlum arrested?" asked the man in Seattle clothes, pointing to Tim.

Sound of his voice seemed to give Keefe a better grip on his emotions. He turned and helped his son who was pulling his way from the floor.

"Where is he?" Tallant muttered. "Where is that—"

"Tallant! Not tonight. Here, take my shoulder."

Keefe turned and located Kid Mundt who wasn't feeling any too sharp, either. "Mundt!—bring us some whiskies to the back room."

IV

HOLGAR SHENSKA, known throughout Alaskan fishing waters as "Holgar the Horse," stood near the front window of the Gill Net Saloon and looked with dull eyes at the early spring rain that was making Fish Alley a quagmire.

"The Horse" had arrived in Alaskan waters nine years before, and had spent five of those years on a halibut troller, patiently doing the work of two men for one man's pay. He might have gone on in that manner to the end of his days had not Brynne Keefe chanced to see him one night in the process of wrecking one of the joints on the Alley.

A table had sailed through the front window, taking a length of frame with it, splattering glass in Keefe's face. Spangler, the Alaska-Blue Star "special deputy," reached inside his mackinaw for the butt of his ever-handy .45 and asked,

"Want me to calm him down, boss?"

"Let him go," Keefe said, smiling, and next morning he sent Spangler around to hire The Horse at double pay.

The Horse's duties were simple. He was to remain available for special tasks. Perhaps the special task was to dump a labor organizer in the bay, or to crack the jaw of some independent seiner. Whatever it was, The Horse performed as ordered.

The Horse was just turning from the window to order another mug of beer when his dull eyes fell on the familiar form of

Spangler coming in boots, slicker and sou'wester.

"Maybe I get yob," he commented, hitching up his pants.

Spangler poked his head inside the door and said, "Come along."

"Yah," answered The Horse.

He put on his oilskins and plodded along, slightly to Spangler's rear, like a trained bear following its keeper.

Spangler went to the Blue Star wharf shanty where five men were sitting around the stove.

"Where's Big Chris?" he asked a former salmon pirate named Freeland.

"Drunk," answered Freeland.

"Go get him."

Freeland grumbled and went out, buttoning a slicker over his mackinaw. Spangler stood by the steamed-over window, looking at the vague outlines of halibut and salmon trollers tied at the docks. When he wiped the steam from the pane he could see the dim features of Gallway, and a mile or so closer, the whitish streaks which marked the positions of those two Blue Star traps at Cabbage Point. Strips of fog kept sliding in from the timbered mountains, mixing with the rain that kept whipping across the inlet.

Freeland came back with Big Chris, a Swede only fifty or sixty pounds lighter than The Horse. Chris was not drunk, but he was still shaky after a bad night.

Spangler barked at him, "Damn you, when I say nine o'clock, I mean nine o'clock!"

Big Chris hiccuped and flopped down on a bench, leaning forward with elbows on knees so that the backs of his hands almost touched the floor. He looked at Spangler as though he hated his guts, but he knew better than to say anything at the moment.

Spangler pointed from the steamy window, "Do you see those traps over on Cabbage Point?" Nobody bothered to look. "Well, Calloway has an idea he's going to cut them loose on the tide tonight, and we're going to stop him."

"How?" asked Freeland.

"We're going to be out there, four of us in each of the watchman's shanties, waiting for him."

"Aye tank you bane in big hurry to get me har at nine o'clock," muttered Big Chris, twisting the lid from his box of snooce.

"When I want your opinion I'll ask for it."

Freeland said, "Nobody asked for my opinion either, but if Calloway sees us go over there, he'll know better than make a play at those traps. He's no fool, that Calloway, and he's tough. In fact, he's tougher'n hell. I don't mind earning a few fast bucks on a job like this, but I don't hanker to get caught on any ocean-going salmon trap. If he knows we're there, he'll find a way to—"

"If you'd shut up and listen, I'd explain it to you. Now, we know he's going to tackle them tonight. There's plenty of soupy weather blowing down from the straits, according to the dot-dash, so the inlet should be grayed out before the day's over. When it does, we'll take a couple of skiffs and get over there without anyone knowing. If the fog happens to lift so they can see us from Gallway, to hell with it—we'll have to figure out something else then."

"What do we do—fight 'em with our hands?" asked Freeland.

"There's a rifle for each of you down in the boats."

"Do we shoot to kill?"

"If I didn't want you to shoot to kill I'd give you a pocketful of firecrackers."

There was a moment while the men listened to a piece of tarpaper flapping on the roof.

"What's the penalty for murder?" asked a hard-faced fellow named Lockley.

Chris, "Hangin' aye tank."

Freeland chimed in, "Your damned right it's hangin'."

Spangler, "You'll be protected. You're guards on a trap, and that gives you the right to shoot at trespassers. You don't need to be afraid with old King Salmon Keefe backing you."

They waited. The fog came in successive wind-blown sheets, but now and then a hole opened so they could see the outline of the country across the inlet.

"How the hell can you be so sure that Calloway is going after those traps tonight?" Lockley said.

Freeland answered, "Why, Keefe has a little set of ears. The prettiest set in Ketchanka. Sure—Eva Hartman. She picked

Big Chris looked up into the muzzle of Eva's revolver.

it up from Calloway and peddled it to the Judge. Tried to get him to order the traps removed. He said he'd do it if he knew just when Calloway planned to act. Holy bald-headed hell! and she went for it. So the Judge—"

"Shut up!" muttered Spangler.

The cold, rainy mist became solid shortly before noon. When it was so thick they could not see the end of the Blue Star docks, the men descended the row-boat hatch and set out across the inlet.

It was wet work, quartering the waves, with the wind carrying rain and flecks of spoon drift. Despite their slickers they were soaked by the time they reached the floating traps.

Spangler with The Horse and two others took charge of the trap nearest Gallway, and he put Freeland in charge of the other which was a half-mile closer to town. They hauled their boats over the pot timbers and scooped them two-thirds full of water to prevent them being visible except from above.

The day wore away, gray and cold, with the shacks weaving in the wind.

Big Chris hunched against the wall for a couple of hours, then he stood up and commenced shaving kindling into the dinky woodstove.

"What do you think you're doing?" asked Freeland.

"Aye bane goin' to start fire."

"You'll start no fire here!"

Chris beat on the sheet-metal stove top with his fist, "Aye bane cold!"

"Start that fire, and Spangler will be over here with his six-gun and he'll warm you up."

Chris thought that over. He was afraid of Spangler, but his bout with John Barley-

corn had taken his resistance down, and the wet had crawled inside his clothes.

"All right, aye don' build fire, but aye goin' to go back for bottle."

"You'll stay here!"

"Aye be back in plenty time. Aye bring bottle for you feller too."

"Let him go," said a former jailbird named Demart.

This was all the encouragement Big Chris needed. He stood up, buttoning his oilskin coat, pulling his soggy Scotch cap down over his ears. The thought of whisky brought some of his natural cheerfulness back. "Skol!" he shouted, lifting a hand as though it already contained a flagon.

"You won't leave here!" snarled Freeland.

"Ho! Aye leave alright—"

Freeland leaped in front of him, seizing a rifle as he went. Chris hesitated a moment, standing so tall the bottom of his cap touched the deadening felt which had been nailed over the ceiling. With a swing of his fist he batted Freeland to the wall. Freeland rebounded, his rifle clattering away. Chris smashed him again, dropping him like a dead man.

"Skol!" Chris muttered, looking at the huddled form of the fish pirate. "Noo skal ve go, yah!"

The wind caught him, almost whipping him from the ladder as he descended to the squared spruce logs that made up the floating framework of the "pot"—that web-lined inner portion of the trap where salmon were herded by means of the long "lead" and an intricate system of barricades. He balanced himself on the slippery framework, his oilskins flapping in the wind as he baled out the boat. Then he dragged the craft to open water and set out with the wind at his back for Ketchanka, six miles away.

TIM Calloway deliberately chose his time to get rid of those obnoxious fish traps which Keefe had placed at Cabbage Point. He needed a strong ebb to carry them off when their anchor cables were cut, and that particular night seemed to offer just about what he was looking for. He was even glad when the rain began. It meant that the traps would be a good distance off before Keefe could do anything about it.

There were five men at Gallway to do the job—Olaf, Jack Queens, the halfbreed George Yukat, and a young Scandinavian named Jonsrud. They had stayed in the Gallway office, keeping warm by the heating stove, watching the rain and fog over the inlet. Twilight settled early.

"Ready?" asked Tim.

The others were glad to get started.

"Better take these," he said, tossing rifles to George Yukat and Jonsrud.

All of them except Big Olaf carried guns when they left Gallway in two skiffs. Olaf had never carried a gun—he had his axe.

"Aye do plenty guede work with this axe if aye see damn Blue Star man," he told them.

It was a mile to Cabbage Point. An old watchman's shack stood on a spit of land, just above the reach of the spring tides.

The shack had been covered by tarpaper once, but the tarpaper had blown away leaving cracks as thick as a man's finger through which the wind whistled, carrying its fine spray of rain. The men sat there, huddled in slickers, holding cable cutters and rifles.

Once in a while, as darkness settled, the traps with their watchman's shanties perched above became visible through the haze.

"Damn funny," muttered George Yukat, twisting a brownpaper cigarette in the shelter of his opened slicker. "I thought I saw somebody move at one of those shanty windows."

Olaf snorted, "Aye tank you bane gettin' yumpy."

Night, and there was a long wait in the darkness. At last Tim glanced at the luminous dial of his watch and stood up.

"Well, this is it."

They split into two crews—Tim and Olaf in one boat, and Queens, Jonsrud and Yukat in the other.

Jack Queens waved with his cable cutters as they slid away through the high tide which was lapping the salt-crusted marsh grass.

Judge Hartman had promised to issue an order to Keefe telling him to remove his traps from Cabbage Point, but that afternoon he admitted to Eva that it had not been done.

"But you promised me—"

"My dear, there are many ramifications to a thing like this that a woman would not understand. Legal aspects—"

"You saw Brynne Keefe! Did you tell him that Tim Calloway planned to cut those traps loose tonight?"

"Ah—a word, perhaps. I said something—"

She gave him one furious glance and ran from the room. He followed to the hall, but Eva was already disappearing up the stairs to her room. She came out a few minutes later in sou'wester and slicker, the side pocket of the slicker sagging beneath the weight of a .32 calibre revolver.

"Eva, come back here!"

But she went without a glance. He followed across the front steps and stood bareheaded as she took the shortest possible course to the Alaska-Blue Star boathouse.

Tallant's Keefs launch was in its stall. She let herself down to its cockpit, and stepped on the starter. It went without hesitation. She cast off the bowline, backed into the open waters of the inlet, wheeled and was gone into the twilight of late afternoon. A man was shouting at her from the edge of the dock, but she did not look around.

She had covered about half the distance to the Gallway when the motor commenced to backfire. The boat stopped and commenced drifting with the waves. She looked in the gas tank. It was empty.

Fog and rain hung low to the water, turning the inlet into a gray void. She could not see the shore, but she knew well enough where the wind would drift her. It would take her across to the rocky headlands east of the abandoned California-Pacific cannery, and from there it would be a four or five hour walk to Ketchanka, and there'd be no chance of warning Tim that his secret was out.

She had been there about a quarter hour, although it seemed longer, when her ears picked up the complaining sound of oars in oarlocks, and a boat came out of the mist. A man in slicker and scotch cap was rowing in long, powerful sweeps. She cupped her hands and shouted a couple of times before he turned around.

When he came close she recognized him as Big Chris, one of the laborers on the Blue Star fishing fleet.

"Yah?" he asked, peering at her through the rain. "You want coom to town?"

"I want you to row me over to Gallway."

"Ho! Aye ain't goin' to row you to no Gallway. Aye bane goin' to town for medicine. You leave anchor down on that boat and yump in. She won't get wreck with anchor draggin' maybe."

Big Chris reached over the gunwale of the launch to steady her as she stepped across. She sat facing him, and he pushed away, dipping the oars. Suddenly he paused, the oars clear of the water. He was staring into the muzzle of Eva's small-calibre revolver.

"To Gallway!" she said.

Chris gulped. "Yah. Aye take you to Gallway. Aye take you damn quick."

He wheeled around and rowed steadily into the wind, his eyes seldom leaving the revolver that glistened black and deadly in her hand.

DARKNESS settled in so she could scarcely see the stem of the boat. Chris rowed with dull monotony. The sea was a black, rainy wilderness. They seemed to be standing still, merely keeping even with the treadmill of the waves.

She broke the silence unexpectedly, "What were you doing out here?"

"Aye bane—" Chris stopped trying to figure out a lie.

"You were at the Cabbage Point traps!"

She seemed to know. "Yah."

"Was Brynne Keefe there?"

"No."

"Who was there?"

When Chris did not answer, she pointed the revolver in a more positive manner. "Who was there?"

"The Horse, he bane there. An' Spangler, an' Freeland, an' maybe four more."

"What are they planning to do?"

Big Chris was doing some thinking. He was being taken to Gallway where it might prove unhealthy for him if they discovered his part in the business, so he said, "They ban goin' do plenty shootin' when Calloway try to cut trap loose. But aye say 'no!' By yumpin yimminy they don' get Chris to shoot nobody. So aye bane yump in boat an' start for town."

It sounded reasonable.

By accident or design Chris overshot Gallway, and it took him another half-hour to find his way along the crooked coastline to the cannery float. A light was burning up in the cannery office.

"Come along!" she said, gesturing with her revolver.

They went inside. The building was dark and cold with the sheet metal clattering on the roof and echoing through the long length of it. They climbed a set of stairs and went inside an office heated by a little horizontal stove.

The watchman, an old gill-netter named Sack, was the only one there.

"Where's Tim Calloway?"

Sack blinked at the pistol. "You won't get nothin' out of me with that weepon, young lady. I—"

"Hurry! Have they started over to Cabbage Point? We'll have to stop them. Keefe has a death trap set for them over there."

Sack cussed a little. "I told that young fool not to advertise what he was about. 'Strike at midnight,' says I, 'and let the salvage drift where she may.' I told him . . ." Sack went muttering around, maneuvering his rheumatic old shoulders into oilskins. He grabbed up an old brass anchor light and lit its wicks. "All right, get a move on! We may be in time to stop 'em, but I doubt it."

Sack paused, looking suspiciously at Chris, "What the hell are *you* doin' here, come to think of it."

"Aye bane on your side now!"

The wind was in their favor, and it didn't take Chris long to row the distance to Cabbage Point. The sandspit with its stunted spruce seedlings came up as a shadow over the starboard bow, and a moment later they sighted the outline of the watchman's shanty.

Eve stood in the rocking craft to shout—but the shout did not leave her lips. Through the hiss of wind and waves burst the intense chatter of rifle fire.

V

TIM CALLOWAY left the standspit, pointing his rowboat north of the first trap so the drift of the wind would carry them to its approximate location. After a few seconds he lost sight of the other boat carrying Queens, Jonsrud and Yukat. For a minute or two the water was a close, grayish blur, and the only thing visible was Olaf and his "guede axe" sitting hunched in the stern.

Something loomed up ahead, making him rest his oars. The boat slid on, with waves slap-slapping her sides, and thumped against the lead of the trap—that long, armline portion of the trap which was designed to halt the salmon on their way up the inlet, which was in fact a portion of the Ketchanka river, and drive them to the confinement of the trap's inner hearts over which the watchman's shanty was built.

Tim maneuvered the boat and followed the lead with its underwater system of pipes and nets until he found the anchor cable, now pulled tightly downstream from the force of the tide which was starting to ebb.

He went to work with the cable cutters as Olaf kept the boat steady. After a couple minutes work the last of the steel strands parted, and the lead swung away emitting a series of wooden groans.

"Now two more," said Olaf.

They followed back along the sagging lead to the square system of timbers composing the main body of the trap. They were sheltered a little here by a superstructure of bolted beams surmounted at a height of four or five feet by the dinky shanty.

The second cable was fastened to a joint in the timbers by means of an eyebolt. Tim was feeling beneath the wash of the waves trying to locate it, when Olaf thrust him out of the way, seized a axe, and chopped the bolt free with four mighty swings.

Tim crouched to balance the craft, and as he did so he noticed a boat over there, half submerged in the "pot."

He lifted his head, and at the same instant caught a view of the window slowly being lowered in the shanty up above.

He seized an oar and sent the boat away. The unexpectedness of the movement knocked Olaf to the bottom. A gun whanged out from the shanty window, cutting the night with a yellow powder trail.

Then more guns—a sudden, intense rattle of them, how many Tim could not tell.

The sharp movement of the boat, coupled

with waves, rain and darkness saved them from that first barrage. The men up there had delayed their ambush a trifle too long. They had expected a set-up shot during the three or four minutes which would have been required to do the job with cable cutters.

With two of the anchor cables gone, the trap swung away with the ebb. Spangler was cursing his men. Over his curses came the crash of rifles, furious but blind.

A bullet ripped through the boat below waterline, tearing out a six-inch strip of planking through which water geysered. Olaf pounced on it, stuffing his slicker into the hole. Tim Calloway heaved on the oars. A second bullet connected, making the craft shudder.

A battery electric light flashed on and swung down to focus them in its beam. The fog had blown away enough to make them a perfect target at the distance of forty yards.

Tim rested the oars, grabbed his Winchester from the six inches of water that had now rushed through the rent bottom, swung up and fired with one, swift movement.

He had been a fine shot when a boy, and his eye was not gone in the split-second press of this emergency. The light winked out with an echoing tinkle of glass. He kept on shooting pumping the lever of the gun as fast as he could swing his right hand. The shanty was silhouetted against that lighter something that was the sky. The high velocity slugs were tearing it to splinters.

The hammer fell with an empty click. He had more cartridges in his mackinaw pocket. He dug under his slicker for them and stuffed them in the magazine with slippery cold fingers.

In a second's lull he picked up the sound of shooting over by the number two trap. So they had been in wait at both of them!

"Ol' boat she's bane swamp," moaned Olaf.

It was taking water rapidly through its splintered planking. It commenced listing slowly to one side, the waves lapping over the gunwale.

No more shooting now up in the shanty. The trap was still swinging away. For a moment the fog and darkness covered it. Tim and Olaf sat still, not daring to row for fear of swamping the boat. They drifted, the trap came again in sight, hanging on its one cable. They were carried toward it.

Another light flashed on—probably the watchman's light moved from the other side of the shanty. It swept the water, swinging in slow arcs, reaching farther and farther out. Whoever operated that light evidently did not suspect the helpless nature of the boat. Certainly he had no idea it was being carried in right beneath his nose.

"Here we come!" muttered Tim, sitting very still.

The boat came to rest agaainst the pot timbers as the electric beam swept like a streak of milg through the mist and rain overhead.

Tim and Olaf climbed out, leaving their cable cutters behind. They were lucky to escape with weapons and their lives.

A CORNER of the shack was towards them not more than twelve or fifteen feet away. Their nearness, and the brightness of the battery light kept them from being seen. Spangler was still cursing his men. His hard, gunman's face was dimly revealed in the open window by the fog reflections of the light beam.

"Aye bet that damn girl tip off Blue Star—" started Olaf,

"Choke it off!" whispered Tim.

He had the same thought. In some manner Keefe had found out that this would be the night. Tim had told the girl he would cut them loose on week's best ebb unless her uncle ordered Keefe to remove them. He knew now that he was a fool for having trusted her. Her whole play—her professed love for him, the irate Tallant, had been a frame-up.

"We're in a hell of a fix now!" he said under his breath, walking the slippery, floating timbers.

Then he remembered about that other rowboat. It was over beside the framework which held up the shack. He walked that way, balancing.

"Har!" muttered Olaf, trying to hold him back from what he considered certain death from the shanty.

"The boat!" he whispered.

The tide was running more swiftly now.

They could feel the tug of it, snapping against the shore cable.

A voice from above, "I tell you, this trap is moving! We'll be in a hell of a shape if it breaks free in an ebb like this."

"Where are your guts?" snarled Spangler.

"Guts be damned. I'd rather be a live coward than a stiff hero floating out past Cape March with this heap of kindling around me."

Tim made it to the shanty and stooped to pass beneath. A platform of rough boards had been built there. Radiating from it were planks leading to the tunnel, the heart, and the spiller of the trap.

He waited until he felt the press of Olaf against him, then he went on, pulling the boat in by its tie-rope. He baled with a bucket which had been left in the boat for that purpose, and Olaf lent a hand, dipping with his sou'wester.

The regular splash-splash of dipped water was lost in the general slap of waves.

He noticed Olaf staring upstream. There was something up there. A mass of timbers coming. It was that number two trap. Queens had succeeded in cutting it free.

The electric beam came to rest on it, and there followed a wild cursing up above.

"It's the other trap! Let's get out of here! Why, it'll crack that lone cable of ours like nothing!"

"Hurry, Olaf!" Tim muttered.

"Yah!"

Olaf clapped his souwester back on his head. No more time to bale—they were clomping to get out up above.

The boat was still a third full of water. It would have been hard to lift with good footing, here it was just a rotten gamble. But there was nothing else for it.

A set of legs were thrust down from the trapdoor.

"Ready?" asked Tim.

"Yah."

They lifted. The boat balanced for a ragged instant, and started to slide back.

"Heave!" shouted Tim.

Olaf roared, and with a mighty swing of his shoulders lifted it over the timber. Tim slid it on and it hit the open water.

He had an impression of a man dropping to the platform behind him. Spangler. The gunman reached inside his slicker for the butt of a revolver as Tim and Olaf jumped into the boat.

Spangler came up with his gun. Tim's Winchester was back on the platform. His revolver was in his slicker pocket, and there was no getting it in time. Spangler's range was point-blank, so Tim simply went shoulder-first into the bottom of the boat with its six inches of water.

TO Tim, in the bottom of the boat, the explosion seemed far away. He came to his knees, trying to tear the revolver from his pocket. Olaf was piled on top of him, and that made it all the tougher.

He could see Spangler getting set to center the next one. Olaf sprang up, poising his axe. He flung it, as a lesser man might fling a knife. Its head made a momentary, steely flash in the gloom, and it struck, snapping Spangler double.

Olaf emitted a roar and crouched as though he intended to plunge back onto the platform. Tim slammed him down. He shoved free and heaved on the oars which had been hanging in the locks.

The hulk of number two trap, riding silently in the water, was almost upon them. Spangler came to one elbow, shooting until his gun was dry. The rapid explosions cast a repeated glow lighting his pain-twisted features.

Tim had no time to worry about bullets. It was a close battle trying to escape the long lead and nettings of the drifting trap.

With a final heave at his oars he made open water. Then he rested, breathing a prayer of thanksgiving.

All shooting had stopped. Voices were shouting. A few seconds filled with the groan of colliding timbers. He wondered if that one cable would hold the weight of both traps after all. There came a deep boom! like a single blow struck to a bass drum. That was the cable, snapping far beneath the water.

" Hell of a spot, even for fellows like that," Tim muttered. "I wish I could take them off."

"Aye tank ol' devil take care his own," said Olaf. "They won't drown, but aye bet they get pretty damn chilly by morning."

Tim cupped his hands and shouted Jack Queens' name. Distantly, through wind and rain, came the answer. He kept shouting

and getting answers all the way back to the sand spit. Jack was there with all his men, and three others besides.

"They didn't show too much fight after I got two of those cables cut," Jack grinned.

Back at the Gallway cannery float a third boat came in sight. Tim looked with amazement as Eva Hartman came ashore. A sudden anger swept him. She had given the tip-off to Keefe, and now she was there to watch the outcome—and in a skiff rowed by Big Chris, the Blue Star fink.

"Oh, Tim—" she cried, starting towards him, her long, black slicker flapping around her legs.

There was something in his eyes that made her stop.

He said, "Yes, I'm here. Safe. And those traps of your future father-in-law's are on their way to the sea. Go back and tell him that some of his best killers are trapped on them. Maybe he'd like to go out to Cape March tomorrow morning and pick them up."

"Tim! You don't think—"

"I think you're a Keefe spy!"

She flared with defensive anger. It was all so plain to her—it seemed that it should be plain to him, too. She decided that she hated him. She tried to find words that would tell how she felt, but she stood there, mute, and watched while he led his sodden crowd toward the cannery building.

Big Chris came and tapped her on the elbow, "Aye tank he don' mean all that. Aye skal tell him plenty. You coom on inside, an'—"

"I wouldn't go in there if—Here, you row me back to Ketchanka!"

"Aye tank you better—"

"Row me back to Ketchanka!"

Chris shrugged heavily. "Okay. Aye skal do." He climbed back in the rowboat and rocked on the oars. "Damn. Aye don' bane get that drink very fas'."

SPRING arrived with a warm breath from the Pacific. With it came the cannery supply ships to heap docks with goods and boom Fish Alley with white man and Oriental, flush with their advance pay.

Gallway, which had been forlorn and abandoned, was suddenly a rush of activity. Hers was a historic name in the cannery business, and there was no trouble in finding merchants who would gamble on the year's salmon run.

On the second supply ship, Jack Queens came up from Seattle where he had lined up a Chinese labor contract and made a deal of the season's pack.

He asked about Keefe, and learned that the master of the Blue Star had caused no trouble. Keefe had recently expanded, purchasing canneries at Stikine and Istikut, and he apparently had little time to worry about Gallway.

It was only a breather, though. They knew that. Ketchanka meant more to Keefe than all else combined.

"They tell me in Seattle that Keefe contracted to pack 250,000 cases," Queens said.

"That much? Why, that's an average season for Blue Star and Gallway combined!"

"Sure. He wasn't figuring on Gallway being open. You know what it means, don't you?"

Tim knew what it meant. It meant that Keefe would have to get the entire catch or lose his pants.

Queens shook his head. "We have a fight on our hands, Tim. He'll try to block us off. He'll try to shoot us off. He'll pirate our traps."

Tim grinned, rubbing his strong young hands, "And maybe we'll do a little fighting on our own!"

Next morning they watched with binoculars as a couple of Keefe tugs towed a salmon trap to the foot of Marluk Island over to the southwest of Gallway.

"I can't figure that out," said Tim. "That Marluk run has always been spotty."

That was true. When the great run of salmon came up the Ketchanka to their spawning ground their habit was to follow the north shore along Cabbage Point, and leave Marluk pretty much alone.

"He's no fool," Jack Queens said. "If he builds at Marluk, he must know where the fish are coming from."

Then one day there was a surge of life from the deep Pacific, and the mystery of the Marluk traps was forgotten. The yearly salmon run had commenced.

The run was poor and spotty along the coast. The big, pile-driven traps that Tim had repaired and placed in operation on Cape March and Blair Island took only a

scattering of fish. The floating traps of Blue Star, and its Olson subsidiary were also ignored, but the Gallway tender was kept busy brailing from the traps at Cabbage Point.

Fish from those traps inundated the plant, and some of the overflow were taken to Queens' little cannery over by the Mission.

"I never saw anything like it," Queens said after it had continued like that for two weeks. "They're skunked all along the coast. Everybody. Not a standing trap worth the lifting. Why, they're catching more cod and dogfish than salmon. Blue Star is operating at third capacity." He shook his head. "Luck's a funny thing. It was against your dad for six solid years. Now it looks like it was the Calloway turn at last."

However, if Jack Queens had known of a conference then taking place in Brynne Keefe's office, his exuberance would have turned to alarm.

There were five of them at that conference, and one of them was Tallant Keefe. When it was finished he dropped around to one of his favorite honkeytonks on Fish Alley for a bit of excitement, and then went bravely forward to call on Eva Hartman.

"The pater is a tough one for competition," he chuckled expansively. "Even the time-honored whims of the running salmon can't phase him. You know how they've been filling those Gallway traps on the north shore without giving Blue Star as much as a flip of their fins? Well, pater is going to change all that."

"I'm afraid even your father would have a hard time changing the whims of a salmon run."

"But that's where you're wrong, old girl. For do you know what he plans? Now, not a word about it, mind you. It's supposed to be a bit of a surprise for that young fellow over at Gallway. He's going to stretch webbing all the way from north shore to Marluk Island."

"But it's against the law to block off a river."

"Pater, my dear, makes his own laws. However, we're not blocking the river. That is merely half the channel, and on tidewater at that. The salmon still have the privilege of following the south shore, or, if they prefer, they can swim inside those traps we thoughtfully towed to Marluk."

TALLANT lolled back in a spring-filled chair, lighted a cigarette, and blew smoke lazily toward the ceiling. "Oh, that pater of mine is the tough operator, though I won't pretend I didn't have a part in this little scheme myself." He looked at Eva through a gray haze of cigarette smoke. "Come, girl! You don't seem half as happy as I thought you would. You want us to beat that pup, don't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"But what?"

"I wanted you to do it fairly!"

Tallant laughed tolerantly, reaching for her hand to pull her towards him. "Oh come, now! This is the salmon business. You've heard that old saying, 'There is no law of God nor man north of fifty-three!' "

Eva had been trying to tell herself that she hated Tim Calloway, and that she really did care very much for Tallant Keefe, but she was relieved when he finally decided to leave. Her uncle was still at work in his office, so she knocked and went in.

"What is the law that pertains to blocking a channel with a net?" she asked him.

"Why, you know as well as I do. If a river channel is blocked, the salmon will be prevented from running to their spawning grounds. In a few years there would be no salmon at all."

"Did you know that Keefe was planning to block the channel from the north bank all the way to Marluk Island?"

"Nonsense! It is utterly infeasible. If Tallant told you that, he was merely stringing you along. No, my girl, you toddle up to bed and think no more about it."

But "infeasible" or not, two days later when Eva took a run over to Blue Star village, she saw the cannery working top speed with tons of gleaming, silvery salmon on the sorting floor, while busy tenders kept shuttling fish over from the Marluk traps.

Tallant Keefe was sitting with his back against a piling, a handsome figure in his sports clothes.

"Oh, I say!" he grinned. "Business here is picking up, although I hear that Gallway

isn't catching enough fish in a day to stink a Chinaman's hands."

It was evening when she got back to the government house. Her uncle's office door was partly open, so she went in without knocking. A familiar voice brought her up quickly. She looked up at Tim Calloway.

She quickly turned and left the room.

"Wait!" He was following her with long strides.

She tried to get up the stairs, but he blocked the way. There was something about his honest, snub-nosed smile that made it hard to stay angry with him.

He said, "Big Chris told me about picking you up in his boat. He said you were on your way to warn us. I'd have realized, if I hadn't been so Irish-dumb. I'm awfully sorry for the things I said the other night."

"Will you get out of my way?"

"No. And Eva, listen—"

She ducked around him and started up the stairs. She kept telling herself that she was angry, but there was something clean and strong about the man that called strongly to her. She turned for a parting shot,

"In other words, you would believe Big Chris but not me!"

"Listen, Eva! That's all wrong. I—"

Judge Hartman grabbed him by the elbow,

"You came here on business, didn't you? If that business is completed, I'll thank you to leave my house!"

"*Our* house!" Tim reminded him. "I'm a citizen too, you know."

Eva stopped after she was out of sight beyond the top of the stairs. Somehow she was hoping Tim would follow her, though she knew he wouldn't. She listened to the front door close, and the thump of his boots across the porch. She went to the window of the spare room from which she could see the series of stone steps leading down to the upper end of Fish Alley.

It was summer, and the night had no real darkness. She watched Tim walk swiftly, with a sinuous, animal grace. He seemed to know where he was going.

She sat in her room for a while, then she went back down the stairs and asked,

"What did he want?"

"Oh, some foolishness about a net being stretched from the north shore to Marluk Island."

"What action are you going to take?"

Hartman cleared his throat. "Why I intend to check up with Mr. Keefe to see whether there's any truth to the story."

"Did Mr. Calloway say what he planned to do?"

"Pah! He performed his usual chest-thumping. The braggart! Said he'd go up there with his crew and cut the net free from the north shore if it isn't gone by midnight tonight. Midnight! Why, that's only a couple of hours."

Eva knew by some things that Tallant had said that Brynne Keefe was taking no chances this time. He had placed Spangler and a gang of gunmen at the anchor spots to take care of developments.

There was no use arguing with her uncle. He was not a dishonest man, but it was hard for one, lone U. S. Commissioner to stand up against power like Keefe wielded.

She didn't stop to reason what she was going to do. She said good night to him, and left quietly by the front door.

Once at the stone steps leading down to Fish Alley, she commenced to run. Cannery workers—that flotsam of the North—hooted at her. She ran past shacks with big front windows where women sat with lights behind them, past gambling dens, and saloons, and Chink cafes.

There were a dozen men in sight on the public docks, but none of them was Tim Calloway. His boat was not tied up at the float. She listened. In the distance the put-put of an outboard motor was dying away.

"Was that Tim Calloway who just left?" she asked a Japanese stevedore.

"Yes. That Calloway."

She had intended to warn him of the danger that awaited at that northern net anchor. It was too late now. She consoled herself by thinking that Tim was the kind who could take care of himself.

VI

TIM swung his outboard to the cannery float at Gallway and strode across the docks where a good two-thirds of the crew was lying around with nothing to do. Beneath a gasoline floodlight an enter-

prising Chinese had started a fan-tan game. From inside came the clank of cannery machinery as one line kept going on salmon that trickled in from the standing traps along the coast.

He found Jack Queens moodily contemplating the scene from a catwalk that ran along the front of the building.

"What did his honor have to say?" he asked.

"Just what we expected."

Queens shrugged. "Well, we entered our complaint, and that's the important thing if this business ever ends up in court—which I doubt."

"Did you locate the north anchor of the webbing?"

"Sure. But it's no good, Tim. That damned Keefe has ten men down there, and what I mean they're heeled."

Tim scratched his head thoughtfully. "How well do you love that sein-boat of yours?"

"It's as much yours as mine. If we lose it we'll be half out of business."

"And if that net stays, we'll be *all* out of business!"

"The boat hasn't power enough to drag the net free, if that's what you have in mind. It's held by a deadweighted three-inch hawser, and—"

"Never mind that. Just send one of the boys in for all the dynamite we have, and come down here with me."

The seiner was one of the standard fifty-footers of the Alaskan coast. She had a prow fitted with a kelp knife to cut her way through weeds. She stunk of fish, needed a coat of paint, but her big workhouse motor purred like a butcher shop cat.

"What the hell are you going to do with all that powder?" Queens asked when he saw a Philippino trucking out two one-hundred-pound cases.

"I'm going to hook it on the anchor with a long fuse. That kelp knife on the prow should cut out way through the top of the net, and I dare say that two hundred pounds of nitro hooked to the bottom should do the business to that three-inch hawser."

In an hour they were ready. The cases of dynamite were roped near the top of the anchor. Extending from the top case was three feet of double underwater fuse. A Danish fish-grader who had once been powder-monkey in the gold mines of Juneau sat with his back against the cases, an unlighted fuse spitter extending from the pocket of his shirt. Down below the engineer was adjusting the carburetors a little and revving up the motor.

"Let it go!" called Tim.

They set out as though it were one of the regular trips across to the main channel, and thence either to Cape March or the Mission. A faint, saffron glow hung on the midnight horizon but the water was purplish with darkness.

Scarcely a word was spoken aboard the seiner. It slowly increased its speed until the propeller was boiling under full throttle.

"That anchor will pull us apart like a string of sausages when she hits bottom," muttered Queens.

Tim laughed. He felt pretty good about it all now that they were started,

"The nitro has enough buoyancy to balance it. She'll sink as gently as a dandelion seed."

OFF to the left was the foot of Marluk Island and the new traps with which Keefe was hogging the deflected salmon run. To the right was the mainland with a little, silvery line of froth showing where water and shore met.

The helmsman swung shraply at the foot of the island, and raced up the right-hand channel. Tim watched for the net, knowing its approximate location even though it was too dark to see its line of floats.

Someone was shouting over on the bank. The Dane had lighted his spitter fuse. He crouched there, eyes on Tim.

Tim gave him a hand signal. The Dane bent and quickly applied the spitter to the notched fuses. He crouched back, as they hissed with a reddish flame that crept with menacing speed toward the big, wooden boxes.

There was a yellow flash of light from on shore, a clank and whine of a high-powered bullet striking steel and glancing away. A second later came the ka-whang of a rifle.

"We'll be blown to Ketchanka if a bullet hits this powder!" grinned the Dane.

Other guns then, a sudden fury of them,

too many to count. They tore splinters, whanged steel plates, and glanced away, whining like yellowjackets.

Tim bent over the explosive, the Dane beside him. From a boiler room port someone was returning the fire with unknown results.

A string of grayish streaks came in sight over the bow. Those were the net floats. Tim said something. The Dane took one side, and himself the other. Anchor, powder and hissing fuse were tossed over the stern. It lit with a splash and bobbed a couple of times in the boiling wake, a coil of medium rope unwinding after it. The rope came tight and twanged like a banjo string. Then it relaxed a trifle, showing that anchor and exlosive were skimming the bottom.

There was a momentary hesitation and the boat veered a few degrees as the kelp knives sliced through the top four feet of webbing. The anchor rope whipped, grew tight, and snapped.

They were going away now. The rifles kept popping away, but the range made them ineffectual. Finally the shooting stopped, and there was no sound except the full-throttle hum of motors and the swish of wake.

Everyone except Tim and the Dane had taken cover praying that no bullet would strike the dynamite. They crawled from the hatch now, watching the water astern.

It seemed like a long time. The Dane crouched on his knees, lips moving as he counted. He lifted one hand and held it poised. With an exclamation, he dropped it.

There were a few seconds of waiting. Then, with a deep rumble, the placid waters of the inlet erupted in a tall geyser of froth.

"Yo-ho!" shouted the Dane. "That call for one drink whiskey for eberybody, hey?"

Queens did a jig-step and answered, "A drink be damned. Take us over to town and I'll make it an imperial quart."

JUDGE HARTMAN had tried to find Brynne Keefe that night, but Keefe was at Istikut where his new cannery was suffering from fish famine. So the judge decided to play a few hands of solo at the Silver Salmon.

It was there that he heard the distant roar of dynamite, and, an hour or so later, received news of the destruction of the net.

"Well?" asked Fred Mayfair, operator of a saltery up the coast, lifting his eyebrows at the judge. "What do you do in a case like that?"

Hartman did not answer. What, indeed, should a commissioner do about a man who unlawfully dynamited an unlawful net?

Mayfair thereupon went on to say something which caused Judge Hartman's spine to become as rigid as a pike-pole,

"In a month's time the run will be over. If this month goes like the last one, Keefe will be flat broke while Tim Calloway and Jack Queens will be the top dogs in Ketchanka. That's the salmon business for you!"

As a judge down in the States, Hartman had served in awe of the great corporations. "They're the backbone of our stable economy!" he had been fond of saying in his philosophical moments. When he was sent north on this political job it was natural for him to sympathize with Keefe. Now, if Keefe went under . . .

Next morning at breakfast he said, "Eva, don't you think you're being too stern with that Tim Calloway? After all, he has great possibilities, that lad. A fine, upstanding young man, Eva!"

Eva almost dropped her coffee cup in amazement.

JACK QUEENS walked across the Gallway float four days later and asked Tim Calloway if he'd ever heard of a man making twenty consecutive passes at roulette.

"No. Why?"

"Because that's just what we're doing in the fish business. I was out looking at that Cape Shelton standing trap of ours. It's running full, while that Blue Star trap license 553, a few miles down the coast isn't getting a smell."

"They're doing better than we are at Cape March."

"Oh, what the hell? They have to pack twice as many fish in order to make their contract, don't they?"

About noon the tender ran over to Shelton, but it came back empty reporting that a pirate craft had raided the trap and lifted every fin.

"He put up a fight, that watchman," said the skipper, "but what could you expect? They opened up on him with a dozen rifles. You should see that shanty of his. Riddled like grandma's colander. What a mess."

"What did the pirate craft look like?" Tim asked.

"Couldn't tell. She was a fifty-footer, but her pilot house was covered with tarps, and they had gunny sack hung over her lettering."

Salmon pirates had always operated along the Alaska coast, and it was not unusual to have a couple of traps lifted in a season. Tim thought little more about the matter until next day when the two standing traps on Cape March were raided, as was a floater up the river.

To check up, he ran his outboard along the shore to Blue Star village. No fish famine there. No loafers along the float, and the iron chinks were clinking along in fine style.

At Cabbage Point the traps were still taking good numbers of salmon, so Gallway kept going on a restricted basis.

Tim tried to find extra men to serve guard duty on coastal traps, but none wanted the job. Word had gone around that King Salmon Keefe was on the kill, and who would risk his life for Gallway salmon, even at triple wages? At the end of a day's search, Tim returned with three men whom he had hired at $30 a day.

"Bye golly, aye tank we go broke at that rate," moaned Olaf.

"We have to get up the pack!" Tim answered with short temper.

He armed the men and sent them to the most valuable trap along the coast—the one at the head of Blair Island.

Next day the masked seiner lifted the two traps at Cape March, and at midnight a power boat made a try at the number two at Cabbage Point, but it was finally driven off by rifle fire from the shore.

The salmon war was the only topic of conversation in Ketchanka. Keefe was fighting off his streak of luck. He was pirating every fish he could locate, trying to keep his over-expanded empire from collapsing. At every street corner Eva heard men talking salmon war, she heard it in every parlor on Nob Hill, and Tallant was exultant with the approaching Blue Star victory when he came each evening to call.

"Is Blue Star pirating those Gallway traps?" she asked him one night. She was determined to get to the bottom.

"Blue Star? Oh come, girl! You can't accuse us of anything like that. There have always been pirates along the Alaska coast."

"I notice none of your traps have been lifted."

"But we haven't been getting the run."

"Then why are your canneries running full for the first time this season?"

"Well, I'll tell you, Eva. We buy fish from independents when they become available. If somebody wheels up with a hold filled with fish, we don't look into their pedigrees before signing a check."

As soon as Tallant left, the Chinese houseboy padded in and motioned Eva to the kitchen. There, by the rear door, sat Big Chris, his face so bruised she had to look twice to recognize him.

"Chris!"

"Aye bane have fight," he said, trying not to move his jaw too much. "Those Holgar the Horse beat me up plenty."

"Why did you come here? If you want to see the judge—"

"Aye don' want see no judge. Ay yust want get even wit' those damn Blue Star pirate. So aye coom see you. Maybe you tell somebody else."

He didn't mention Tim's name, but it was obvious that Tim was whom he meant.

"Tell what?"

"'Bout goin' to raid big Blair Island standin' trap. Holgar the Horse, he coom to me an' say, 'Chris, tomorrow we skal raid Blair Island.' Aye bane tell him Calloway have four, five guard on that trap with rifle. He say, 'We got eight-ten men with rifle and plenty damn dynamite, you bet. We goin' have big boss on boat, too.' But aye say, 'No. Aye don' skal work for Blue Star now. Aye skal goin' get yob on halibut trooler and to hell with ol' rough stuff. Aye yust goin' to be honest fisherman from har out.' Then next ting Holgar bane hit me. Yumpin yimminy, aye don' know what happen from then on but I guess it bane one hell of a fight."

"So to get even you came to tell me. Why didn't you go to Gallway?"

"Maybe they don' believe me. Maybe

Calloway say, 'That damn Chris he's Blue Star pirate.'"

Eva walked to the hall door and called, "Uncle!"

"Aye don' want no more trouble, by golly. Aye yust want yob on halibut trooler—"

"Sit down!"

CHRIS obeyed, easing himself to the edge of a kitchen chair, his purpled eyes apprehensively on the door as Judge Hartman approached.

"Tell him about it," Eva commanded.

"No! It bane yust like tellin' story to ol' King Salmon Keefe."

The judge made a gesture showing how this remark irritated him. "Nonsense! You can be perfectly frank with me. Your words will never be carried beyond this room."

Chris went ahead and told his story, eyeing the judge apprehensively, twisting his hat as though he were trying to wring water out of it.

"Well?" asked Eva when he was through and the judge had spent some time pondering.

The judge stood straight with fine resolve, "Why, I intend to look into this!"

"To go to Keefe?"

"No! I will take the government launch out there along the coast where I can watch that trap through binoculars. I intend to see exactly what goes on, and when I get the facts, I will make a full and complete report to the United States government."

Actually, the judge's resolve was not as high as he made it sound. He intended to get the facts—and then wait. If Keefe won out, he would do nothing. If, however, it looked as though Blue Star was going on the rocks, he could raise himself in Tim Calloway's good graces by getting in on the kill.

The judge was pleased with himself for having thought of this fine means of hedging. He chuckled to himself as he put on warm clothing, for even in mid-summer the breezes were chilly on that northern sea. He went downstairs with his long, ten-power binoculars tossed over his shoulder, and Eva and Chris were waiting for him.

There was a slight mist hanging to the surface as they set out through the near-darkness in the government launch. They rounded Cape March and found a hiding place in a little-used channel between the mainland and the rocky shore of Blair Island.

About a half-mile away was the extensive framework of the Calloway standing trap.

Like most coastal traps, it was constructed of pile-driven spruce poles which extended twenty or twenty-five feet upward from the surface of the water. Atop the poles were wandering platforms of log and plank. Grayish netting hung in apparent disorder. Smoke commenced coming from the tar-paper covered watchman's shanty atop the trap indicating that breakfast was being prepared.

"What do they eat?" asked Eva with natural woman's interest.

"Plenty geude, fresh salmon fish, you bet," grinned Chris.

After a few minutes the judge handed the binoculars to Eva and pointed across the water. Even without the binoculars she could make out something coming toward them from the direction of Cape March.

Four men came from the trap shanty and stood watching. They didn't seem to be alarmed. The boat approached, and tied up at the spiller.

"Aye tank it bane yust ol' Gallway boat," said Chris.

The boat drained the catch aboard. Someone climbed the trap ladder to sign for the fish, and the boat pulled away.

"Well, is that an example of your piracy?" the judge snorted.

"You tank you go now?"

"Wait!" commanded Eva.

IN SCARCELY a quarter-hour a second boat came in sight and headed toward the trap—it was a grayish seiner with part of its superstructures masked by tarps.

Olaf chuckled to himself, "Blue Star pirate bane yust too late this time, by golly!"

The boat swung close, and the whang of a high-speed rifle bounded across the water.

"Good heavens!" said the judge.

"That one was yust warning. They yust show trapman they ain't foolin'."

It took the skipper of the masked craft

two or three minutes to ascertain there were no fish in the spiller.

Chris sat chuckling. "That bane good yoke on ol' King Salmon Keefe. He's on that boat, aye guess."

The judge was studying the men on deck. He saw someone who made him go tense.

"Keefe?" asked Eva.

"Yes. And Tallant is there, too."

The pirate boat swung clear of the trap and nosed along close to shore. They expected it to swing to the channel west of Blair Island, but instead it came straight on, sliding through a patch of kelp, picking its way up the narrow channel almost toward the rocks where the government launch was hiding.

"Aye tank we better get out of here," said Chris, reaching to turn on the ignition.

Eva stopped him. "There's no use trying to get away. They'd run us down."

At a distance of forty or fifty yards the pilot shouted and jingled the engine bells. He had seen the low-hulled government boat there among the rocks.

Chris waited no longer. He peeled off his coat and plunged into the cold sea. He shook off the remainder of his clothes as he swam, feeling his way around submerged rocks. Half a dozen men came through the hatch of the seiner.

"It's Miss Hartman and the judge," Freeland shouted.

Lockley was there, and The Horse, and Demart and several others. It was a moment before Brynne Keefe appeared. He was roughly dressed in a gray sweater, laced trousers, and knee boots. Tallant came up a moment later to stand at his father's side. Then Spangler, carrying two guns instead of his usual one.

"Lower a boat!" Keefe barked.

The crew rushed to obey him. It was plain he was in no mood to trifle after his bad luck back at the trap.

Freeland and Spangler rowed the skiff over. Spangler looked at the judge and growled, "Climb aboard!"

The judge was very pale, but he summoned enough of his faltering dignity to say, "Sir! I have every intention of returning to Ketchanka by the same conveyance in which I came. And as for—"

Spangler muttered a vile word and flipped a gun from his shoulder holster, "You're goin' aboard the seiner, Judge, one way or another."

The judge hurried to board the skiff, and Eva followed him. It took only a minute or so to reach the seiner.

Brynne Keefe stood with feet wide apart, watching as they were boosted aboard. The expression in his eyes gave Eva a chill. It was the same inhuman expression she had seen there that night Tim Calloway had refused his handshake.

"You found out enough to satisfy your curiosity?" he asked.

The judge stammered, "I don't know what you—"

"Your niece has always been out to cut my throat. She had my son fooled, but she never fooled me. You understand that your action today leaves me only one course. I have often heard you comment on the value of the large corporations, Judge. Therefore, I know you will be the first to appreciate that the existence of Alaska-Blue Star means more to the country than a pair of lives. You—"

"Dad!" Tallant had gone a trifle pale. "What are you talking about? . . ."

"Son, go below! This is once when you're not going to interfere with my expedient methods."

"The judge, maybe, but Lord!—you can't do such a thing with a woman!"

"The fact that she is a woman merely makes it more unpleasant."

VII

THE HORSE stalked over, looking at Keefe with his dull eyes. He was bruised up considerably with great purple and red blotches where Big Chris had connected.

"Aye say something, yah."

"Well?"

"Aye tank other feller tell."

"What other fellow?"

"Big Chris. He yump overboard from government boat when we stop. Maybe he go to town, tell—"

"Why didn't you say something before, you fool?"

"Aye don' know. Aye think—"

"There he is!" shouted Freeland.

Chris had reached waist-deep water and was wading two hundred and fifty yards away. Spangler ran to the gun rack beside

the hatch, grabbed an 06, aimed, pressed the trigger.

The bullet tore a streak of froth a few inches to Chris' right. He plunged forward, half swimming around a cluster of glistening black stones. Other men pumped bullets. Chris went on, splashing knee-deep water, fighting sticky sand until he disappeared into the evergreens growing close to the shore.

Keefe cursed. He looked around for someone on whom to vent his wrath. His eyes fell on The Horse. He set his heels, and swung a terrific right to The Horse's jaw.

The Horse reeled, backpeddling, coming down heavily on his heels so that the entire boat trembled in the water. He struck the cabin and slid down with eyes glazed like a steer's under the mallet.

"Well, where do we go from here?" asked Tallant.

Brynne Keefe gestured at Eva and the judge. "Take them below." He strode half the length of the boat, then stood looking into the fish hold. It was empty save for the accumulated slime and odors of the previous day's thefts. He then answered his son's question,

"If you think I'm going back to Blue Star village without a haul, you're wrong. There isn't much left of the season. If Blue Star goes as many as three days without capacity, it fails in its salmon pack." He shook his hands under Tallant's nose. "I've won a fortune with my hands. Torn it from these cold waters despite the worst my competitors could throw at me. They call me a thief, a pirate, a killer. But I'm a business man. It's men like me who make the backbone of this country. And I'm not going to be beaten because some punk kid prevents me from meeting a flock of paper obligations to a lot of woman-fingered bankers down in Frisco! We're going to get in a haul today . . ." He smiled grimly, hands on hips. "And I have an idea where we're going to get it!"

"Pater, may I be so bold—"

"We're going to lift those traps at Cabbage Point."

"Right in full sight of Gallway and—"

"Yes, and with the fish the commissioner himself locked in our hold. Why, this is first rate, Tallant. The Judge likes to be on the winning side, and here he is!"

The sun was making a gleaming yellow path across the waters of the inlet when they turned around the eastern end of Marluk Island and headed for the floating traps at Cabbage Point.

Keefe nervously paced the deck, repeatedly peering through the dissolving mists to see if any unusual precautions had been taken for the protection of the trap. There was a watchman on each of them, of course, but Gallway was more than a mile away.

The watchman had come from the shanty and was looking at them through binoculars.

"This will be easy," grinned Tallant.

"Too damned easy!" growled Keefe.

"We'd better get below. No use in advertising—"

"The hell with it! I'll take what I want, and I don't care who sees me."

Tallant winked to Spangler. He was proud of his father—the man who took what he wanted! Quoth Tallant, "There's never a law of God nor man north of fifty-three."

A gun rattled out somewhere in the hold. Tallant and his father both spun around.

"Who fired that shot?" barked Keefe.

The watchman in the floating trap hurried back to his cabin. Lockley ran below to investigate. He could be heard booting on a door.

"It's the judge," shouted Lockley, heaving against the door of the chart room with his shoulder. "They've locked themselves in . . . firing from the port to warn Gallway."

"Stay away from that door!" It was Eva's voice. Something about it told Lockley she was not joking. The gun cracked, tearing splinters from the panel closest his shoulder.

"Holy bald-headed hell!" muttered Freeland, peering down the hatch. "How'd you like to have her for a wife?"

Tallant laughed and whacked the leg of his sports trousers, "It's lucky for us salmon pirates that the judge isn't that tough."

Keefe laughed grimly at his son's words. He admired strength. He admired that girl down there, just as he despised the judge.

"Leave them alone, Lockley! We've had enough shooting to stir up the hornets as it is."

The floating trap was only a couple hundred yards away now. There came a whang from the watchman's rifle—a warning bullet across the bow.

FOUR of the men took places in protection of some netting bales. Others crouched in the cockpit or in the cover of the hatch. They were all schooled in jobs like this, and that one rifle didn't sound too tough.

Another fifty yards, and the four rifles opened up. The high-velocity, soft-nose bullets were tearing the shack to slivers. The watchman stayed low, and Keefe knew by experience he would cause little more trouble barring the arrival of reinforcements.

He watched Gallway. Men were running across the float. One of them was tall Tim Calloway. Someone came lugging a couple or three rifles. They were climbing aboard the snub-nosed cannery tender.

The side of the pirate craft rubbed the timbers of the spiller and it was made fast.

"Hurry with that brailer!" shouted Keefe.

Keefe stood near the edge and looked down into the transparent waters. The net-made compartment was seething with fish. It would be a great haul, and more than that, a daring haul—but they must hurry! hurry!

The first scoop of fish showered through the air, and the slimy bottom of the hold came to life with flip-flopping salmon. The brailer again. Over at Gallway the tender was just pulling from the float. Another scoop—a mighty one—but the elevating mechanism had stopped. Keefe spotted the trouble. One of the ropes had run afowl of its block.

"The block! You fools!" screamed Keefe as the operator put on more power, making the jam worse.

Nobody seemed to know what to do, so Keefe swung up, hand over hand, and heaved on the fowled rope.

"Power!" he bellowed.

The winch operator tossed his lever, and the rope promptly locked again.

The tender had left Gallway by then and had covered a third of the distance.

"To hell with it," shouted Freeland. "Let's get out of here before—"

Keefe cursed and snapped the rope free. He dropped back to the deck and struck Freeland with his fist so that he backpeddled and sprawled across one of the bales of webbing up forward.

"I'm issuing the orders! We'll stay until these fish have been lifted—every fin of them. Tim Calloway will never see the day he chased Brynne Keefe from his own waters."

Encouraged by the prospect of help, and by the preoccupation of the men aboard the seiner, the watchmen raised up from the plank bulwark at the base of the shack and sent a bullet screaming across the deck. Spangler and Demart opened up again.

"Work that brailer!" Keefe shouted, his feet spread wide, ignoring the whine of high-velocity bullets.

The tender from Gallway was in range, but she had not opened fire. She was coming full speed, her twin screws sending boiling fountains of water out behind.

Spangler turned his attention to it and aimed a bullet at her cabin. A couple of rifles aboard the tender opened up in answer. Tallant plunged down the hatch to cover. Spangler was hit by a bullet from the watchman. He staggered up, dragging his rifle, and plunged head first into the hold amid a seething fifteen inches of fish. In seconds he had disappeared as though in quicksand.

Now at last Keefe took to cover. He stepped around the cabin and waited there, a long-barrelled .38 magnum revolver in his hand.

There was a cold smile on his lips. He was waiting for one shot. Just one.

The tender came straight on—a powerful little workhorse with a heavy steel prow.

"That damned boat's going to ram us!" shouted the pilot.

He rang for reverse, but no one had removed the bowline from the trap. The line snapped tight and held them there as the prop rocked the boat impotently.

The tender was only forty or fifty yards away now, still full speed, aimed square amidships. Shooting dwindled to the single whang of the watchman's rifle. The fish pirate crew fled over the side, leaping to the water, to the trap timbers, keeping submerged or in shelter as they fought to get away.

TIM Calloway had issued the order that sent the tender directly for the pirate craft. Sunk there, at Cabbage Point, that seiner would be never-ending proof of the pirate's identity.

There were four aboard—the engineer, Olaf, Jack Queens and himself.

The engineer set the wheel and crawled aft, ready to go over the stern. Tim raised up to check their course. The tender was aimed dead amidships. At that moment he noticed a face at one of the ports—a woman's face—Eva Hartman!

He sprang toward the engine, hurling the prop to reverse. The sudden action threatened to strip gears and twist off the drive shafts, but the boat took it, bucking like a rodeo horse.

He swung the rudder. The boat skidded against her keel sending a swell of water as large as she was. The combined actions broke her forward speed, but she went on side first and smashed against the pirate's hull with a crunch of steel plates.

Queens and Olaf were shouting at him, but Tim did not listen. He pulled himself up to the seiner's deck while she was still pitching. There was no one there to face him. He turned just as Tallant ran up from below.

Brynne Keefe had been knocked off balance by the impact. He regained his footing and nudged around the cabin with the magnum revolver poised in his hand. He did not dare shoot because Tim and his son were too close together.

Jack Queens was climbing aboard. Keefe swung with the revolver. Queens saw it aimed at him for a fraction of a second. There was nothing he could do but release his hold and drop. The tender had been carried away, leaving him struggling in the water. Olaf tossed him a line.

Tallant Keefe tried to get away from Tim and locate his father, but the quarters were close there in the hatch. He was no good at rough and tumble, anyway.

"You coward!" Tallant sneered, picking himself up from the bottom of the hatch where Tim had flung him. "Send a woman to do your job for you!"

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean! And when the pater caught her, who was it saved her pretty skin? Me! I saved her!" Tallant spat blood from his bruised mouth and backed toward the engine room. When he was a few feet away he turned suddenly and ran inside, clanking shut the metal fire door behind him.

"Eva!" Tim called.

He heard her answer through a bullet-riddled door right by his shoulder. The bolt grated, and it swung open. Eva was there, facing him, a small-calibre revolver still in her hand.

She dropped the gun and came to his arms,

"Oh, Tim, you don't think—"

"Of course not Eva. I know why you're here."

Judge Hartman came out, a trifle dishevelled, "I have the facts on this piracy now! I have enough to send them to prison for the next hundred years!"

From somewhere Tim could hear his name being shouted.

"Tim . . . The hatch . . . Look out for the hatch . . ."

It was Jack Queens.

He turned away from Eva and climbed the steps of the hatch. He paused before reaching the last of them.

There was comparative quiet. Only a few shouts from the far side of the trap. Gulls veered overhead. A fresh salt breeze lifted a lock of his hair. The inlet was covered by choppy reflections of the morning sun.

Then he noticed something else. A shadow. It extended along the unswabbed deck planking from beside the cabin. Something about it was familiar. Brynne Keefe. Brynne Keefe with a gun.

Tim flipped out his own revolver—the double-action .45 he had been carrying that first night back in the Silver Salmon. Jack Queens had taken the gun away from him that night, but there was no choice now. He would have to shoot first or die.

He pointed the muzzle of the .45 against the hatch wall and pulled the trigger three times.

The gun rocked the narrow passage, filling it with choking powder smoke. Keefe muttered something, and his boots thumped the deck. Tim leaped to the open, grabbed the casing of the hatchway, snapped himself around.

He expected Keefe to be retreating—if he had escaped those three bullets. He thought they would settle it with guns.

But Keefe had not retreated. He had charged forward, and the two of them collided.

The unexpected impact knocked the gun from Tim's fingers. There was no chance to pick it up. Keefe was bringing the barrel of his magnum into play.

Tim grabbed his wrist and thrust the gun high. It went off, and its heavy recoil knocked Keefe off balance for a second. Tim heaved him backward. They struck the cabin and were locked there in each other's strength.

Tim smiled through his teeth, "Afraid to face me without a pistol, Keefe?"

Keefe grunted. He sneered at the effrontery of this pup. Slowly, deliberately his fingers opened, and the gun clomped to the deck.

"Satisfied?" he asked.

Tim nodded. He released his grip on Keefe's wrist and stepped back.

FOR that moment Tim's guard was too high. It was the advantage Keefe had wished. He sprang in, swinging his sledge-hammer fist with every ounce of his magnificent bulk.

But unlike that evening back in the Silver Salmon, Tim was ready. He, too, had learned the tricks of the sailor's brawl. He used one of those tricks now.

He took the punch with a swing of his body. At the second of its impact he came up with his left, jacknifed his arm short of its apex, and closed it on Keefe's wrist.

For a second Keefe's fist was held in a vise formed by Tim's forearm and the muscles of his bicep. Keefe was not balanced correctly to jerk free. Tim wheeled back, carrying him further off balance. Keefe lashed with his other fist, but he was in no position to put force in it, and besides, Tim was bent over with only his shoulder and part of his head showing.

Then, with the speed of an uncoiling spring, Tim came up and around. The blow started with his toes and combined the strength of calves and thighs and back and the long, whiplash muscles of his arms.

There was scarcely a sensation of it landing. It was that devastating. It knocked Keefe reeling. He struck the cabin, rebounded, hesitated in the middle of the deck. For the moment his eyes were blank as the eyes of a netted salmon.

Tim sprang forward, paused on the balls of his feet, and struck with a one-two left and right that made Keefe's head roll as though his neck were made of rubber.

Tim took a massive haymaker that Keefe uncorked, shifted inside, and slammed him again. Keefe reeled backward, balanced momentarily on the rail, and fell overboard. He lashed around in the water between the seiner and the trap.

His groping fingers located the trap timber, and he pulled himself up on it.

Tim was momentarily conscious of Olaf and Queens watching from the cockpit of the tender—of the Blue Star pirates on the timbers at the far side. It was truce for all hands while these giants of the canneries fought.

Tim sprang down just as Keefe pulled himself to one knee. He crouched, shaking water from his hair. He rose and timed a punch as Tim came in, but the old steam was gone. Tim took it, and kept coming, smashing him back.

Keefe fell half in the water. He made it up, some instinct keeping him on the eighteen-inch floating beam.

Tim advanced, and Keefe wailed as he retreated along the timber,

"You've beaten me. You've smashed my business. What more do you want?"

It did not sound like Keefe. The sniveling words did not match the gleam in his eyes, either. He went to one knee as though to catch himself, and as he did so his hand reached back and closed on a wrecking bar.

It was a heavy steel bar with a sharp, hooked end and two prongs for pulling spikes.

Keefe suddenly laughed and sprang up, the bar lifted high.

But Tim came straight in. The heavy, hooked end missed, and only the shank found its mark. Tim's weight was unexpected. It rammed Keefe backward. Keefe clutched the bar to him and reeled back, trying to hold his slippery footing.

He did not notice the end of the timber. Below him was the net-filled tunnel of the trap—that narrow, webbed opening below water where salmon were herded from the lead to the inner hearts.

He balanced a second, and plunged backward. He sank, lashing like a speared salmon, the hooked end of the big bar tangled in his gray sweater.

He was down there, fifteen feet below the surface, with the netting wrapped around him.

Tim stared at him, trying to shake the drug of battle from his brain. He seemed to come out of it suddenly. He reached for the nettings trying to pull them, but they were tied fast.

The Blue Star pirates were over there, edged as close to the shore as they could get.

"Come here! Quick!" He was trying to drag the netting out, but it only tore the skin from his fingers. "We have to raise these tunnel nettings!"

The pirates did not move to save their vanquished leader. They were the rats who deserted their ship in the storm.

Tim yelled to Queens. The tender eased over against the trap, and Jack Queens and Olaf went to work raising the tangled netting. Tim opened a clasp knife and dove deep, but it was useless, trying to cut through a hundred strands of tough webbing. Useless, and too late . . .

THE noon sunshine was bright on the water when Big Chris showed up dressed only in his salvaged trousers, steering the government launch. He'd concealed himself in the evergreens until the pirate boat was gone, and then swam back after it.

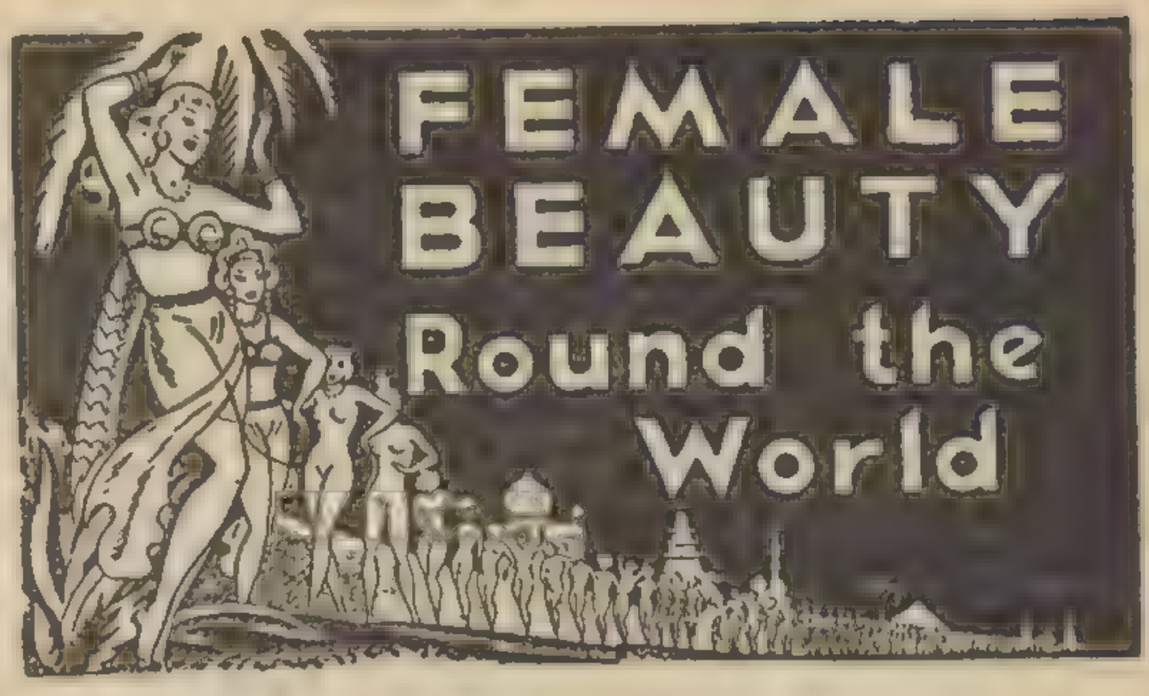
"Aye bane geude feller from har on," he said piously to Tim and Eva as he pointed the boat toward Ketchanka. "Aye yust bane goin' to be honest fisherman, you bet. You don't want geude, strong feller at Gallway?"

"We might be able to use one," Tim said.

"Aye bane geude man in fight, too. Maybe aye skal hunt up that Holgar the Horse and beat the yumpin yimminy right out of him, yah."

The judge spoke up, "Maybe you will need a fighter or two, my boy. I have it on good authority that the California Bank of I and C was going to take over Blue Star if Keefe failed. Those bankers will be tough competition for next year's run."

"Why, that will be fine," grinned Tim, standing comfortably close to Eva. "The tougher the better!"



World's Greatest Collection of Strange and Secret Photographs

NOW you can travel round the world with the most daring adventurers. You can see with your own eyes the weirdest peoples on earth. You witness the strangest customs of the red, white, brown, black and yellow races. You attend their startling rites, their mysterious practices. They are all assembled for you in these five great volumes of **THE SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND.**

600 LARGE PAGES

Here is the world's Greatest Collection of Strange and Secret Photographs. Here are Exotic Photos from Europe, Primitive Photos from Africa, Torture Photos from Asia, Strange Photos from Oceania and America, and hundreds of others. There are almost 600 **LARGE PAGES of Strange and Secret Photographs,** each page 57 square inches in size.

1,000 PHOTOS

You see actual courtship practiced in every quarter of the world. You see magic and mystery in queer lands where the foot of a white man has rarely trod. You see Oriental modes of marriage and slavery in China, Japan, India, etc. Through the intimacy of the cameras you witness the exotic habits of every continent and the strangest customs, in America, Europe, etc. You are bewildered by these large pages of **ONE THOUSAND PHOTOGRAPHS,** including 130 full-page photos and thrilled by the hundreds of short stories that describe them.

Contents of 5-Volume Set
VOLUME 1
The Secret Album of Africa
VOLUME 2
The Secret Album of Europe
VOLUME 3
The Secret Album of Asia
VOLUME 4
The Secret Album of America
VOLUME 5
The Secret Album of Oceania

5 PICTURE PACKED VOLUMES

The **SECRET MUSEUM OF MANKIND** consists of five picture-packed volumes (solidly bound together for convenient reading). Dip into any one of these volumes, and as you turn its pages, you find it difficult to tear yourself away. Here, in story and unusual photo, is the **WORLD'S GREATEST COLLECTION OF STRANGE AND SECRET PHOTOGRAPHS,** containing everything from Female Beauty Round the World to the most Mysterious Cults and Customs. These hundreds and hundreds of large pages will give you days and nights of thrilling instruction.

Specimen Photos
Dress and Undress Round the World
Various Secret Societies
Strange Crimes, Criminals
Omens, Totems & Taboos
Mysterious Customs
1,000 Strange and Secret Photos

SEND NO MONEY

Simply sign and mail the coupon. Remember, each of the 5 Volumes is 9¼ inches high, and, opened, over a foot wide! Remember also that this 5-Volume Set formerly sold for $10. And it is bound in expensive "life-time" cloth. Don't put this off. Fill out the coupon, drop it in the next mail, and receive this huge work at once.

Metro Publications, 363 Broadway, Dept. 1806, N. Y. 13, N. Y.
Send me "The Secret Museum of Mankind" (5 great volumes bound together). I will pay postman $1.98, plus postage on arrival. If not delighted, I will return books in 5 days for full refund of $1.98.

Name .....

Address .....

City ..... Zone.... State.....

☐ CHECK HERE if you are enclosing $1.98, thus saving mailing costs. Same Money-Back Guarantee.
Canadian and Foreign Orders—$2.50 in Advance.

JINX CAMP

By C. HALL THOMPSON

Grim Fate was hitting Brig Sutton below the belt with both fists when she made him construction boss of the most jinxed railhead town in the North.

THE small knot of railroad construction men grew tight, and an angry muttering washed through it like a wave. Brig Sutton's slate-gray eyes roved over the heads of the disgruntled men, and he glimpsed the slap-board, hit-and-miss railhead town the workers had dubbed Jinx Camp. Even the name of the place was a sore spot on the record of the construction boss.

Other camps had sprung up along the shining ribbons of the rock-ballasted road, but they had had good names. They had come into being before all the trouble started. Now, this one had to be called Jinx Camp, Sutton thought bitterly. The big bosses of the Great Pacific Railway Company would know what that meant. It could mean only thing; that the men were angry, afraid, and in the end would bog down on the job.

Sutton's eyes slitted as they raked over the lean-to houses, the long line of freight-cars in which the workers and their families lived, and in the distance, the first flickering of the dusty bright lamps of the Golden Rail Saloon. It was virgin country, wilderness stretch, and the twin bands of the rail were making it an empire, but men who are frightened and sullen don't care about empires. They think about their own lives, and those of their families, and they say to hell with empires.

Finally, the construction-boss turned his gaze to Reese McCloud, who stood a few feet to his right. His assistant nodded his massive blond head confidently and winked at Sutton. The shadow of a smile winged across Sutton's mouth. McCloud was with him; he had one man on whom he could depend. But, before him stood a man he would have to fight. Sutton drew himself up, so that his bony length seemed tremendous, his thin hips looked lithe and dangerous. He stared at Rod Prentiss without speaking.

"Well," Prentiss said thickly. "We're waitin' fer an answer, Sutton. . . ."

Sutton didn't want to fight with Rod Prentiss. He knew that Reese McCloud was hoping he wouldn't. Reese had a cool level head, and he could always handle Prentiss' gruff manner. Sutton wasn't so sure about himself. He told himself that he would go easy on the kid—for Laurie's sake.

"Come on, Sutton," Prentiss prodded. "An answer . . ."

Sutton turned to the men.

"You know the answer," he said quietly. "I know you men been workin' plenty hard, and you want yer pay. Allright, you'll git it. Soon as it gits here. Just keep your jeans on. Keep on the good job, and everything'll be allright . . ."

The muttering went through the mob and it surged a little closer. In the twilight it was like a scared, dangerous herd of longhorns; ready to break loose with all hell at its heels. Prentiss' thin young face twisted in a sneer. He laughed harshly and went off into a coughing spell. When he had recovered, he glared at the men.

"Git him!" he said harshly. "Everything'll be allright, he says! the whole Camp is jinxed and he says it's going to be jake! What about the accidents, Sutton? How about the men who been killed in them accidents. That's allright, too, huh?"

"Allright," Sutton bit out. "We had some bad luck. It ain't goin' to do no good just cryin' over spilt milk. We got to keep on the job. This road ain't jinxed, now, any more'n it was in the beginnin'. . . . We're almost to end-of-track, boys. Next stop is Wyatt City. . . ."

"The way we're goin' now," Prentiss cut in, "Next stop is goin' to be Boothill fer

Through a sickly mist Sutton saw McCloud lash out viciously with his fist. Laurie crumpled like a rag doll.

all of us . . . I tell you, men, the job is jinxed. It ain't bad enough we gotta work under a jinx, but we don't even git the payroll on time . . . ."

"You'll git the payroll when it comes through," Reese McCloud put in calmly.

THE kid swayed on his feet, his eyes red from rot-gut rum. He glowered at his two bosses, then the eyes narrowed in an insinuating squint.

"You sure it ain't come through already?" he said in a low voice that found an echo in the accusing rumble of the men.

"What're you gittin' at, Prentiss?" Brig Sutton took a step toward the younger man, and felt the hard pressure of McCloud's restraining hand on his shoulder. Reese was right. He had to take it easy. Prentiss was drunk and he was sick. He'd been sick a long time and he had crazy ideas. It wouldn't do any good to brawl with him.

"You know what I'm gettin' at," Laurie Prentiss' brother said. "You know damn well. You sure the payroll ain't come in already and you're jest stringin' the men along? . . . You think you're smart, Sutton, but I kin see yer tricks . . . I kin . . . ."

"Shut up, kid," Sutton barked.

"Take it easy, Brig," said McCloud. "A fight ain't goin' to do no good . . . ."

"I'll shut up when I'm done!" Prentiss shrilled. "You kin make fools outa the rest of the men, if they let you, but not me. I got pay comin' and I ain't goin' to let no tinhorn construction-boss high-pocket me out of it. . . . ."

"You better go on home," McCloud said to the kid. "Laurie'll be havin' supper ready . . . ."

"Listen, I'm goin' to talk till I'm finished. I'm goin' to say what I think. Maybe my sister is kinda soft on Sutton, but that dont' make me keep my mouth shut when I think he's givin' the men a wild goose-chase . . . ."

The mob was very quiet, now. Some of the women had wandered up from the box-cars and were standing by their men. A few grubby-looking kids looked on, waiting for a fight. The men were staring at Prentiss steadily. Sutton's mind seethed. They were waiting to see if he would take this guff from the kid and not do anything about it. If he did, he might lose their confidence for good. But, he couldn't hit a sick jasper, a kid with liquor washing his eyeballs. He couldn't hit Laurie's kid brother.

"Leave Laurie out of this," he said tautly.

". . . I always told her you was no good, Sutton, but she was never the kind to listen . . . Now you're givin' us the run-around, and maybe she'll git wise . . . I ain't goin' to have no sister of mine runnin' around with a . . . ."

"Brig!" McCloud yelled.

Sutton flew past McCloud. A gun-shot right rocketed against Prentiss' jaw, and the kid staggered back. He slammed into the circle of men and came back crazy with anger. He pounded a left across and his knuckles grazed Brig's cheek. The construction boss uncoiled the length of him in a second blinding jaw blow, and Prentiss stumbled into the mob again. He didn't spring back so fast this time. A snarl of shame twisted his whiskey-red face and his thin right hand whipped to his thigh. One of the women on the fringe of the crowd screamed.

Sutton came in low and fast. Prentiss' Colt blazed. A streak of white-hot hell seered across Sutton's shoulder just before he thudded into the lean body of the kid. The two went down in a tangle. In the half-light it was hard to make out which was on top. Then, Brig Sutton was rising slowly, gripping the kid, his arm twisted back. Prentiss swore furiously, but under Sutton's pressure his fingers numbed and the .45 spun into the dust.

"That's enough, Brig," McCloud said quietly.

Sutton let go of the kid's arm. Rod Prentiss was between rage and insanity. Outraged tears welled in his boyish eyes. One of the men from the crowd came forward and put an arm around the kid's bony shoulders. He led Prentiss off along the rutted camp-grounds toward the distant lights of the Golden Rail. A few men continued to stare at Sutton; then they walked off, women and children trailing after them.

"He'll go to Cantrell, now," Sutton said to Reese McCloud.

McCloud nodded. Both men knew what that meant. There was trouble in Jinx

Camp. Big trouble. The accidents they had had weren't just accidents. Sutton knew that, but it did no good to tell the men. The burden of the jinx fell to him and McCloud. There was someone behind it. That much they knew.

MARK Cantrell was a hanger-on. His gambling and liquor house, the Golden Rail, was making plenty of dinero out of the railmen. But, Cantrell had big ideas, and a bad reputation. Since Rod Prentiss had fallen in with him the kid had begun to cause unrest. Sutton walked back to the car that he and McCloud used for living quarters and office. He thought glumly of the fight, of young Prentiss and his sister, Laurie. He didn't like to think of the kid being mixed up with Cantrell, but. . . .

"Fine specimen of man you are, Brig Sutton!"

Sutton and McCloud halted abruptly. Brig's lean dark face came up and his eyes focused on the girl's soft lips, then on her fighting Irish eyes. His shoulder twinged and he did not think of wincing. Laurie Prentiss had been on the road all her life. She said, sometimes, she'd been born to the rail, and could never live otherwise. She was hardened, and yet tender; she could fire a six-gun and thread a needle with the same deadly accuracy. Sutton thought he'd never known anyone so beautiful.

"I'm sorry, Laurie."

He walked past the girl and into the long dimness of the car. McCloud followed, and sank into a make-shift easy-chair. Laurie stood in the doorway. Some of the anger had left her eyes, and there were tears shining.

"Why'd you have to pick on Rod?" she said. "Can't you leave Rod alone . . .?"

Sutton turned to explain, then fell silent. He slumped on a sofa that leaned against one wall of the box-car.

"It wasn't Brig's fault, Laurie," McCloud said. "Rod started the whole thing . . ."

"I know," Laurie said. "I know. But Rod's not well. He does crazy things sometimes, but you shouldn't pay any attention to him . . . He . . . he hasn't got that much longer . . ."

"Take it easy, Laurie," Reese said.

"No, she's right," murmured Sutton. "I know I should've let it go, but he was causing trouble . . . He was liable to git the men believin' I was holdin' out on the payroll. I had to do something . . ."

"You didn't have to make him look like a fool in front of every jasper in town."

"I had to do something, and fast. I had to shut him up . . ." Brig was sitting on the edge of the sofa, staring at her. "Listen, Laurie, you got to understand. Things ain't right in Jinx Camp. This Jinx is something that ain't healthy . . . It ain't all just a bunch of accidents. The men are gittin' plenty scared . . . There's somebody tryin' to cause trouble. . . ."

"Brig!" Laurie's voice was tight and scared. "What're you tryin' to say . . .?"

"Nothin', Laurie, but . . ."

"But, you think Rod is mixed up in it." As she said it, all the anger came back into her eyes. She was fighting for her own flesh and blood, Sutton thought. Even against the man she loved. "I don't believe it!" Laurie said thickly.

"Neither do I. I don't want to . . ."

"But, you do. You know you do . . ."

"It's just that he's mixed up with Mark Cantrell . . . It ain't good for any kid to get mixed up with a polecat like Cantrell. I know his kind. They gamble with other folks' lives . . . They're smart, and they never git hurt . . . It's always the others that do the dirty work . . ."

"Shut up, Brig!" Laurie said. The tears were in her eyes, and she wiped them angrily on her sleeve. She was even more beautiful when she was angry. "Please, shut up. I won't believe it. You and your rotten lies ain't goin' to make me believe it, so, shut up . . . shut up . . ."

"Laurie!"

Sutton was on his feet; he took a step and put out his hand, but Laurie Prentiss only stared at him, and sobbed angrily. She turned and ran down the short flight of wooden steps. Brig just stood and watched her running-stumbling along the dark soil of the road-bed, like a frightened, tender colt.

"Well," he said thickly, to McCloud who still sat in the chair, behind him. "Why don't you go too? Everybody else is desertin', why not you? Sure. This's a good time to cop Laurie fer yerself, Reese; why don't you. . . ." He stopped.

Reese was smiling at him, a quiet, understanding smile that wreathed the broad, rugged face. Any other bucko would've been all het up, but Reese just smiled.

"I'm sorry," Brig said after a minute. He walked over and put a hand on McCloud's shoulder. "Don't mind me none, Reese. Reckon I don't know what I'm talkin' about. If there's a man in camp I can depend on, you're him . . . It's jest that . . ."

"Sure," McCloud said quietly. "Sure, I know. You been in and out of a mess of troubles today, Bucko . . . You're kinda upset, that's all . . ."

"Wouldn't you be? You know what it means if this gang bogs down, don't you . . .? Means my job and my reputation . . . and mebbe Laurie . . ."

"Jest take it soft a spell, Brig." Reese rolled a quirley and offered it to his boss. "Things'll work out jake . . . That payroll's goin' to come through pronto, and once them lobos got dinero in their pockets, ain't nothin' goin' to stop 'em . . . Jinx, Cantrell, or Rod Prentiss . . . Nothin' goin' to stop us 'till we hit Wyatt City . . ."

Sutton nodded slowly, and sat down in the swivel chair behind the old oak desk. His head was feeling fuzzy. Reese got up and went to a trunk. He did a neat job on the flesh-wound in Brig's shoulder.

IT WASN'T Brig's habit to wear guns in Camp, but he buckled on his twin holsters, and thonged them to his legs. Things had quieted down in Jinx Camp. A man might even say they were just a shade too quiet. Sutton knew, or thought he knew, that Cantrell had a finger in the pie of the disturbance. But, Cantrell kept his nose clean. Like Sutton had told Laurie, Cantrell's kind never stuck out their own necks. They struck swift and sure, like a rattlesnake, only they weren't even as fair as a rattler. They didn't give a warning.

McCloud sat at the desk, figuring accounts by the kerosene lamp. He eyed Sutton as his boss pushed the twin Colts into place, but he didn't speak. He only nodded when Brig said he was going out to have a look around camp.

The camp lay dark and lonely under the hot, black sky. It was pin-pricked by campfires outside the cars, and a little to the east, the gray ghost of the lean-to-tent affair that was the Golden Rail winked invitingly. Music and laughter crept out along the dark rail-bed. Sutton passed a jasper who was playing a mournful ballad about a blue-tail fly.

Not many spoke to him. He walked steadily, telling himself that he was imagining it, but he knew it was there, just the same. It wasn't like it had been in other camps. His men and their women were suspicious, now. They didn't look at him the way they used to. Even the children looked scared.

The men had had respect for the hard pile-driving quality about Brig Sutton; he was a tough boss, but he sweat as much blood as any man with a pickaxe. There was power in his thick-muscled shoulders, and a rougish dare-devil quality in his smile that called for respect from men. They liked Brig Sutton. He was a boss and he was a man. But, now, he could see the lack of confidence in their faces as they nodded and muttered half-hearted greetings. There were a few who still stuck by him. Josh Irwin was one of them.

The short, bowlegged Scot fell in beside Sutton and did not speak for a while. He smoked his pipe, and waited for Brig to say something.

"The men are against me, aren't they Josh?"

"Well, now, I wouldn't say exactly that, Mister Sutton."

"Then what would you say?"

"Well, now," Irwin said rubbing the stubble on his grizzled chin. "I'll have ye know that there are them of us, as is still with ye . . . No matter what Cantrell and that young scoundrel, Prentiss would like fer us to think . . ."

"Thanks, Josh. I may need you . . ."

"Ye have but to utter the word . . ."

"You mind standin' guard tonight, then?" Sutton asked.

"Indeed I do not," said Irwin. "But, where may I ask are ye needin' a guard . . .?"

"Here . . ."

They halted beside a gigantic pile of wooden rail-ties. Sutton looked up at the monster of precious wood, and shook his head, thoughtfully.

"Can't take no chances with that wood, Josh." He kept his voice low, even though

they were well beyond the last gleaming camp-fire. "If anything happens to that, it'll put knots in our progress that'd be all hell to untie . . . You got a gun . . .?"

"Aye, laddie," Josh Irwin said grimly.

"You know what to do, if you see anything that don't look right . . ."

"That I do . . ."

Sutton left the Scot still sucking at the old clay pipe. He walked back along the cactus-dry path, following the twin silver ribbons back to center of camp. He halted as a shadow sprinted in his direction. McCloud's familiar rumble came nearer, and the big fellow drew up in front of Sutton; some of his calmness was gone, but McCloud kept his tone quiet.

"Brig, it's the payroll . . ."

"What . . ."

"The payroll . . . It's been lifted . . . stolen . . ."

"What? I mean . . . How did you know?"

"I sent a scout back-track a while ago . . ., about eight-ten miles back, he found the body of the Company man as was to deliver it . . . jasper named Wheatley . . . Remember . . .? Well he was dead . . . shot in the back . . . and the saddlebags was gone. . . ."

Sutton's face tightened, and heavy brows met in a scowl that showed the power behind it. He tightened his belt a notch, an unconscious habit that had hung onto him since his wandering, wilder days.

"Where's Rod Prentiss?" he said levelly.

McCloud's thick lips hung open for a moment.

"Now, Brig," he said. "Don't go saddlin' the wrong pinto . . ."

"All I say is, where is he?"

"I don't know . . ."

"That fool kid," Sutton bit out.

WITH McCloud close behind him, he got to the car where the Prentisses lived. Laurie stared at him frow a rocking chair, her needle poised for another stitch in a red-checked shirt of Rod's.

"Where's Rod?" Brig said.

"You goin' to start that again . . ."

"I ain't startin' nothin' . . . I ain't got time to argue with you. The payroll's been stolen, and the carrier killed . . . I'm lookin' for that loco brother of yours . . ."

"I . . . I don't know here he is . . . He said he was goin' to the Golden Rail . . . You don't think . . . .?"

"I don't think nothin'." Sutton's voice was taut. "Reese, you stay here, case he shows up . . . I'm goin' to pay Mister Cantrell a little visit . . ."

The Golden Rail was in full swing; fiddle and banjo rattled in accompaniment to the rough dancing of the can-can girls. Thick, whiskey-choked man-laughter filled the low, smoke-hazed tent. A few men leaning against the knock-down bar nodded at Sutton. No one spoke. A mob eddied about the faro table, and then made and lost six months pay at a twist of the roulette. Sutton ordered a drink.

"Seen Rod Prentiss?" he said to the bartender.

"He was with Mister Cantrell a while back . . ."

"Where's Cantrell?"

"In the office . . ."

Sutton walked off, leaving the drink untouched. He wove through the mob to the tent-flap that shut off Cantrell's office from the bar room. He pushed through it and stood just inside, adjusting his eyes to the dimness.

Mark Cantrell was seated behind a large, ornate desk. His feet were propped up and well-oiled, tooled-leather boots glistened in candlelight. He was small and neat and he never got his hands dirty. The dark clothes he wore were those of a preacher, but the little derringer in a shoulder-holster meant business. He smiled at Sutton, showing small white teeth.

"This is an unexpected honor," he said in a smooth, Eastern accent.

"Yer barkeep said Prentiss was with you," Sutton said.

Cantrell picked up a bottle of champagne and poured himself a drink. He lit a ready-made quirley and then, with infinite patience, dipped the mouth-end of it into the bubbly-water. His black eyes peered at Sutton with amusement. He sat back and drew in champagne-flavored smoke.

"He was," he said finally.

"Where is he now?" Sutton's voice was cold and even.

"What do you want with him?"

"That's my business. Where is he?"

Cantrell sipped champagne.

"He left me some time ago. You

you have made an enemy in young Prentiss, my friend . . . ."

"Have I? You oughta know." Brig's lips tightened. "Listen, Cantrell. Get this straight. So far you're in the clear. You run a straight place, and we got nothin' real against you. But, you better keep it that way . . . You better not be hooked up with any of this jinx business . . . My men don't like to be kicked around . . ."

"You've got me all wrong, my friend." Cantrell smiled and dipped his quirley in champagne again. "You're excited, and it isn't a good way to be." He stared at the glass in his hand. "What's Prentiss mixed up in?" he said without looking up.

"I'll talk to Prentiss about that," Sutton retorted.

It would be best to keep the payroll business quiet as long as possible. If it got to the ears of the men that their dinero had been stolen, it would only make Rod's accusation of crookedness on Sutton's part look more plausible.

"I don't know where he is," the gambler said. "I . . ."

His voice trailed off. Outside the music had stopped suddenly, and a couple of women were screaming. Drunken, panicky male voiced roared. The hysterical high feminine cry of "Fire!" brought Cantrell to his feet.

He was through the tent-flap at Sutton's heels. The smoke-congested room was seething with action. Men were yelling and running for the main exit. Tables overturned and glasses smashed on the plank-floor. Sutton pushed his way to the bar and yelled at the bewildered bartender.

"Where's the fire?"

"Outside. Somebody yelled fire, outside . . ."

SUTTON tore his way through the crazy mass of men. He lost Cantrell in the mob; when he got out to the rutted main-street of the Camp he was alone. Weird orange lights flickered along the freight-cars, making monstrous shadows on the ground. Sutton twisted and gaped at the gigantic bonfire of the ties. He bit out a curse and broke into a loping run.

The whole population of Jinx Camp was flooding toward the flaming pyre of the ties over which Josh Irwin had been watching. Women were crying hysterically, and men piled forward with huge buckets, slopping water. Children clung together in frightened, staring knots. Sutton careened through them, jostling, yelling for order, trying to quell the threatening riot of fear. As he neared the huge pile he could feel the searing heat against his face.

"Brig!" a voice yelled. "Over here, Brig . . ."

Sutton whirled, caught a glimpse of Laurie Prentiss, and beside her, waving his hands frantically, Reese McCloud. The construction boss ran across the clearing near the fire. McCloud was talking even before he reached them.

"Josh Irwin," Reese said. "Been shot . . . still alive, though. He's been callin' fer you . . ."

Sutton gave Laurie a fleeting glance and brought his mind back to the problem in hand. He let McCloud lead him through the mob toward a smaller group of men. Someone had formed a bucket-parade, and water was flowing steadily, fighting the lapping hunger of the fire. The men stepped aside to let Sutton through.

As he knelt beside Irwin's limp figure, Sutton glimpsed a familiar, pale face among the others. Prentiss gaped down at the dying man, his mouth lax with drunkenness. He looked sick and scared. Sutton leaned closer to Irwin. The old Scot's eyes flickered open, and slowly focused beyond his boss's face. Irwin was staring at the kid. Sutton heard the little gasp that came from Laurie. Irwin tried to speak. His lips moved but only a wet gurgle issued from them. The eyes glazed and his head fell back hard. An uneasy murmur went through the small group. Sutton straightened slowly and his eyes raked the faces of the men, settling on Rod Prentiss.

"He was lookin' at you, kid," he said quietly.

"No . . . I . . ."

The roaring flames reflected crazily in Prentiss' wide eyes. Some of the men stepped back away from him. He looked at Sutton, then jerked his head from side to side. Then, abruptly, he spun and ran wildly away from the mob, pushing people aside, glaring over his shoulder as though a demon were at his heels.

"You men stay here; help with the fire . . . I'll take care of Prentiss," Sutton ordered.

. . .

"Brig . . ." Laurie was beside him, her slim hand on his arm. "Don't . . ."

"I'm . . . I'm sorry, Laurie . . ."

He turned and went away swiftly, feeling her eyes on him, staring ahead at the retreating, stumbling figure of her brother. He passed McCloud, and heard him say: "Take it slow, Brig . . ."

The bonfire of the ties seemed to light most of the Camp with a hellish glow. Prentiss dodged back and forth, trying to shake Sutton from his trail. He hugged the shadows of the box-cars. Sutton walked slowly, with a dead-sure stride. He tried not to think of Laurie.

Prentiss ducked behind a car, then climbed up over the locks that linked two others. For a moment he was out of Sutton's sight. Sutton doubled his pace and made for the opening through which the kid had disappeared. He was climbing through to the other side when he stiffened. The hollow roar of a six-gun split the hot, still night.

Somewhere, a horse whinneyed nervously. Sutton whipped one Colt from its holster and slid to the ground silently. A rustling in the shadows brought him up short. Someone was running. A thin slight figure slit away from him. Sutton's iron came up and belched flame. The figure was gone. Brig took a step and stumbled over the body that lay half in shadow.

WHEN he turned Rod Prentiss over, a glance told him the kid was dead. The shell had gone through the back and ripped out his chest. The horror was still in Rod's glazed, open eyes. Vaguely Sutton was aware of running feet and the muttering of many voices. His eyes ran along the thin body of Laurie's kid brother. Rod hadn't been wearing a gun . . .

The voices were nearer, and suddenly hushed. Sutton was aware of the mob falling back. Then, the neat, sharp figure of Mark Cantrell separated itself from the black mass. The gambler stared coldly at Sutton, and ran his level gaze over Prentiss' corpse.

"Prentiss wasn't wearing his artillery," he said quietly. "Where I come from, shooting an unarmed kid in the back stands for murder!"

The rumble of the crowd was cut short as Reese McCloud pushed through, making a path for Laurie. The girl stopped and let out a short, hurt cry. Brig Sutton straightened and stared at her.

"Laurie . . . I didn't . . ."

"Brig . . ." Her voice was choked with tears. "How could you . . . He was only a kid . . . a crazy, sick kid . . ."

Brig shifted his gaze to McCloud's heavy, serious face. Even he thought he had done it. Sutton tried to bring out words, to explain. Laurie had knelt beside her brother and was crying hard. Her sobs cut into him and made words seem weak and empty.

Cantrell's calculating eyes searched his face, and when the gambler spoke, his tone was cool and sure. He had a way of talking, a way of convincing men.

"I don't know what you men are waiting for. Rod Prentiss told you this bucko would cause trouble. Now, Prentiss is dead. He was right when he said the next stop was boothill . . . for all of us, as long as Sutton held the reigns . . ."

"Keep your mouth shut, Cantrell . . ."

"You'll have to shut it, first. The way you did Prentiss'. Murder's a bad thing to play with, Sutton. You should've known it would come out that the payroll was stolen . . . That the carrier was murdered . . ."

The words had the effect Cantrell had aimed at. The mob pressed forward. Somebody yelled "Murderer!" A woman cried: "What're we waitin' fer!"

"Hold on!" Sutton barked sharply. "You ain't given me a chance to talk, yet. I dunno how Cantrell got wind of it, but you might's well know the truth about the payroll. It was stolen . . . sure . . . and the carrier was killed . . . But, I didn't have nothin' to do with it . . . any more'n I . . ." He glanced at Laurie's bent head. "Any more'n I killed the kid . . . ."

"Lies!" a voice blurted.

"We'll all end up on boothill like Prentiss said," a jasper yelled angrily.

"Hangrope!" That's the answer!"

"Wait!"

The surging crowd buckled back at McCloud's roar. Cantrell spun and yelled at the men:

"You going to let his right-hand man stop you . . .!"

"Hangrope!" screamed a woman.

"I said hold on!" Reese shouted. "I don't know how all this is goin' to work out, but I do know hangin' ain't goin' to do no good . . . It ain't goin' to git you back that payroll is it . . .? I say give Sutton a fair trial . . . Then, if he's guilty . . . .." McCloud's eyes met Brig's steady gaze and shifted away.

The men pushed in on the tightening circle and Sutton's hands hovered over the butts of his six-guns. Then, Cantrell raised a slim hand. He turned to Reese McCloud.

"All right. A trial. Fair and square. We hold Sutton prisoner at my place 'til he can be tried . . ."

"You ain't holdin' me nowheres, Cantrell." Sutton's lips were tight and dry. "You engineered this whole thing, kit-an'-kaboodle jest to suit yerself, didn't you? You got the men behind you, but you ain't goin' to git me . . ."

"Wait a minute, Brig," McCloud cut in. "Take it easy-like. This is the best way . . . You listen to me an' everything'll be jake . . ."

A protest reached Sutton's lips but he didn't speak. In McCloud's eyes there had been something sure and promising. He knew Reese; he knew the big fellow had a plan.

"You men better git back to that fire, now," McCloud was saying, "Cantrell an' me will take Sutton to the Golden Rail. He'll be tried tomorrow . . ."

Cantrell took one of Sutton's arms, and a man called Trent got both Colts from their holsters. Reese was on the other side. The noise of the mob moving away covered his low whisper.

"There's a sorrel outside our car . . . Make a break for it, and take to the hills . . ."

As they walked past Laurie, Sutton glanced at her. The girl turned away without a word. A couple of the workers had picked up the kid, and were carrying him back to the Prentiss car. The three men walked slowly, without a word.

Sutton's arm was tense in Cantrell's grasp, and he tried to relax, in case the gambler caught on. They passed from the shadows of the trains, across the open coolness of the roadbed. They were behind the shield of the huge tent that was the Golden Rail. Sutton twisted his arm from McCloud's loose grip and slammed it into Cantrell's fancy vest.

The gambler doubled, and McCloud made a play at trying to hold Brig in tow. The construction boss came around with a right that was pulled at the last minute. McCloud plummeted backward and lay still.

With a shadowy grin on his lips, Sutton turned to meet the onslaught of Cantrell. He caught a slim wrist and twisted. The nasty derringer slid from bloodless fingers and the gambler swore hoarsely. He brought his bony knee up into Sutton's middle. A powerhouse left catapulted against his temple, as Sutton closed in. He stumbled back over a guy-rope. Sutton drew him to a standing position with one fist clamped on his natty lapel and slashed another blow to the pallid face. Cantrell went limp, and Sutton let him slide to the ground.

As he sprinted through the silent shadows into the open, Sutton continued to grin. He caught McCloud's whispered, "Good luck, bucko!" and waved a silent thanks. The sorrel was waiting, as Reese McCloud had said it would be.

FOR nearly two hours, Brig Sutton lay concealed in a clump of chaparral in the foothills that sprawled only half a mile from camp. He smiled grimly as he watched the minute flames of the rag-and-oil torches carried by the posse, winking like man-hunting fireflies against the craggy blackness of the buttes.

His ruse had worked. When he had reached the foothills earlier, Sutton had dismounted and set the sorrel loose. There was bound to be a posse on his tail before long. They would follow the trail of the horse into the wilderness of shale and mud paths of the upper mountain range, while he hid in the foothills, waiting until it was safe to return.

From the beginning, he had known he must go back. He must get in touch with McCloud and between them they would finish the thing right. They would find the real murderer of the kid, and the man who high-jacked the payroll; they would put the finger on Cantrell so that he couldn't squirm out from under. And then, maybe Laurie would . . .

The angry men of the posse could not

see the dark shadow of Sutton as he left the low shelter of the foothills and lit out across the mesa for the camp. He ran in long light strides until he was in the protective shadow of the caboose, just outside Jinx.

The great bonfire of the ties had been squelched and a cloud of silence and darkness hung over the line of cars. Even the lamps of the Golden Rail seemed dim and cold. The slapboard town was deserted. Women and children had turned in and the men were tracking down a jasper they would call murderer, and shoot on sight. Sutton told himself he would be out of luck if McCloud was with that posse. That was a chance he had to take.

Sutton edged along the darkened cars, hugging the inky shadows. Four cars down. He had to make the fourth car unseen. Once inside he could wait for McCloud. A single light burned in the window and Sutton mounted the wooden step-ladder. He slid in through the half-open slide-door, and stared at the thin figure bent over McCloud's desk.

In the same moment the figure tensed and spun. The lamplight glinted on the derringer in Cantrell's hand. He stood in front of the desk hiding whatever lay on its top.

"I had an idea you might double back, Sutton," the gambler said quietly.

"You better be careful with that toy-pistol, Mister. I don't like hombres that can't tote man-sized irons."

"Don't move, Sutton."

"Jest curious," Brig said slowly. "What you hidin' behind you, Cantrell . . ."

"That's what's the matter with you, my friend. Curiosity. You've got too much of it . . ."

The sentence broke off as Sutton dove. He twisted to the left as he pounded into Cantrell's fragile body. The explosion sounded like a cannon. He kept going, carrying the gambler with him. They crashed against the desk and caromed off to one side. Wind gushed from Cantrell as they hit the rear wall of the car. Sutton grabbed his right arm and banged the wrist against a cross-bar. The derringer clattered to the floor.

Cantrell whimpered childishly as Sutton's fingers clamped about his collar. Sutton's face was only inches from his.

"You did it," rasped Sutton. "You planned the whole thing you rotten, thin-skinned little coyote . . . You killed Rod Prentiss didn't you? Spit it out, before I fix it so you'll be spittin' teeth instead . . ."

"No . . . No!" Cantrell screamed in a wheezing gasp. "I didn't! I swear! I . . . maybe I got rid of Prentiss, but it wasn't my idea . . . I didn't plan it . . . I'll tell you who it was . . . Just let me alone . . . I'll tell . . ."

The cough of a six-gun shut out Cantrell's pleading. His hysterical jabbering broke off abruptly and he gaped with a funny, surprised expression, like a clown in a circus. Then, he fell limp against Sutton. Sutton spun and Cantrell thudded to the floor.

"Cantrell always did talk kinda loose, Brig," Reese McCloud observed with a calm smile.

"REESE. . ." Sutton took a step forward, and the still-smoking Colt in McCloud's hand drew bead on his heaving chest.

"Don't make any hasty moves, Brig!" The smile was gone and the voice had a sharp ring in its softness.

"You . . ."

"Then, you didn't know . . ." McCloud laughed, a low menacing chuckle. "I wasn't sure about you at all, Brig. A man can't never be sure about a hombre like you. After that brawl with Prentiss, I thought mebbe you'd caught on to my game. Recollect how you said why didn't I desert, too. Why didn't I cop Laurie fer myself? You was gettin pretty close on my tail, then, Brig . . ."

"Too close to see things clear," Sutton said tightly.

"Don't fret none, Brig. Wasn't yore fault. I was purty well covered up, what with Rod and Cantrell. Everything worked out fine . . . jest like I said it would . . . fer me . . ."

"What's the payoff, McCloud?"

"Take a gander at the desk, there," Reese answered. "Surprised, hunh? That was what Cantrell was hidin' from you . . . The payroll . . . and Prentiss' gun . . . Cantrell took it when he got the kid . . . If it'd looked like you shot the kid while he was wearin' iron, the men might of called it 'self-defense' . . . But, when you shoot a sick jasper in the back,

when he ain't totin' protection . . . That's murder, Brig . . ."

"You had it all figgered out, nice and neat . . ."

McCloud shrugged massive shoulders.

"There was a few chances to take . . . Fer instance, it was easy enough to git the kid hopped up with likker and then git him to set fire to the ties . . . But, it wasn't so easy to shut his mouth afterwards . . . He near broke down when Josh Irwin looked at him . . . When he run away, I give Cantrell the high-sign . . . You know the rest . . ."

"So you got the aces, pardner," Sutton said. "What do you do when they're played out?"

"I win," McCloud husked. "Hands down. Winner take all. I git yore job as construction boss . . . and I git Laurie . . . It might take a little time but . . ."

"You still got me to handle, McCloud."

"And I'm still hangin' onto an ace. When the men was goin' to lynch you, I stepped in. That was fer Laurie's benefit. I like to make things work out nice, Brig. Then, I let you light out fer the hills . . . The posse could take care of you there, nice and neat; they shoot first and ask questions later . . ."

"Only the posse didn't take care of me . . ."

McCloud shrugged again.

"Everything can't be jest perfect, bucko. Like I said, I had to take a few chances. I had to take chances on Cantrell and Rod . . . but I shut them up in the end . . . I had to take chances on you comin' back . . . you did. But you made the mistake of comin' to me, Brig. Ain't nobody goin' to protest if I kill an escaped murderer . . . who jest shot pore Mark Cantrell. No . . . Looks to me like they'll see it th' other way around. I'll be a hero. I'll be the jasper that got Rod's killer, and brought back the payroll . . ."

"Reese!"

The way Laurie Prentiss cried his name was enough. McCloud twisted away for a split second, and Sutton leaped. He heard Laurie scream, and the blinding roar of McCloud's six-gun drowned it out. Lead bit through the flesh above his hip. He clutched at McCloud as he pitched to the floor.

McCloud was moving fast; he was out of reach. Through a sick mist, Sutton saw him lash out viciously with his left fist. Laurie took the blow flush on the jaw; she crumpled like a doll. Rage poured new strength into Sutton's numbed legs. He blundered to his feet as McCloud dove through the door.

Painfully Sutton got to the desk; he drew Prentiss's Colt from its holster. He barely saw Laurie's body through the haze of pain and he stumbled through the doorway. A shot of orange flame stabbed out and bit a hole in the box-car, close to Sutton's hand. Somewhere a woman screamed wildly.

THREE cars down, a figure dodged in and out of the shadow. Sutton staggered forward and McCloud's third bullet slammed out. The figure was moving again through Sutton's hazy vision. Moving to the car, clambering up the ladder to the top of the car. The shadow of McCloud paused, twisted and his gun spat again.

McCloud was running along the top. If he could make his arms work. Make his fingers hold the gun. Sutton's mind whirled and he forced himself to draw bead on the running, bobbing figure. He fired. The shadow kept running. A second shot. McCloud stumbled and lurched like a wounded buffalo. Sutton squeezed the trigger again and a fourth time. He saw McCloud careen to the side and pitch head first from the top of the car. People were running all about him. He had to get back to Laurie. He . . .

He fell forward and lay face down in the black soil of the road bed . . .

Night shadows were sliding away; first there was a cold slate in front of his eyes, and then warmer richer light. It was like watching a sunrise. Brig Sutton opened his eyes a little and waited for them to focus. Sunlight streamed into the familiar car, washing the bunk in which he lay. A hand touched his, and he slowly turned his head.

The sight of Laurie brought it all back. His hand grew taut over her warm fingers.

"Laurie . . . You all right . . ."

"Yes . . ." She was smiling, the old smile that Sutton had wanted to see. "I'm alright, now, Brig. We're both alright, now . . ."

He lay for a moment without speaking. Then, his brows drew together and he tried to get up on an elbow.

"The payroll . . . I got to tell the men about the . . ."

"Now you jest take it easy, Brig Sutton," Laurie said gently. "The men know about the payroll. They . . . know about everything. I told them jest the way I heard McCloud tell you . . ."

Sutton sank back and looked at her for a long time. He put his hands on her shoulders and drew her down. He kissed her. They both laughed softly.

"Laurie . . ." The laughter was shadowed for a moment. "About Rod . . . I . . ."

"It's alright, Brig. I understand." Laurie's smile was a little sad, now. "It's funny what likker and sickness can do to a man . . ."

"Or love and ambition," Sutton said softly.

"Don't think about Reese. Not now . . ." Laurie's face brightened again. "The men say as how you ain't to think of anything but gettin' well. They got everything settled . . . A new consignment of ties'll be in first thing in the mornin' . . . You jest lay back there and . . ."

A large familiar head poked itself into the car. Russ Wallace, assistant foreman, grinned.

"See the patient's kickin', Miss Laurie," he said.

"Just about," Sutton grinned back.

Wallace nodded and winked at both of them. "Well, guess I better git to work down at railhead . . . We'll be waitin' fer you, Brig . . ."

"You won't have long to wait."

Wallace winked again.

"Next stop, Wyatt City, boss!"

Brig Sutton didn't know whether he felt like laughing or crying. He solved the problem by winking at Wallace and giving Laurie a kiss. Sunrise was a wonderful thing to see.

UGLY BLACKHEADS OUT in SECONDS with
EVEN THESE ..EASILY
VACUTEX BLACKHEAD EXTRACTOR $1.00
SAFE • SURE
SANITARY
DAINTY
FAST
PLEASANT
Blackheads are ugly, offensive, embarrassing. They clog pores, mar your appearance, invite criticism. Now your blackheads can be removed in seconds, scientifically, and easily, without injuring or squeezing the skin. VACUTEX creates a gentle vacuum around the blackhead, cleans out hard-to-reach places in a jiffy.
Germ laden hands never touch the skin. Simply place the direction finder over your blackhead, draw back extractor . . . and it's out. Release extractor and blackhead is ejected. VACUTEX does it all! Don't risk infection, order today!
JUST 3 EASY STEPS
Yes, in a jiffy, VACUTEX removes blackheads, painlessly and harmlessly. You have blackheads—then apply VACUTEX, and then presto, chango, they're out.
10 DAY TRIAL OFFER
Don't wait until embarrassing criticism makes you act. Don't risk losing out on popularity and success because of ugly, dirt-clogged pores. ACT NOW! Enjoy the thrill of having a clean skin, free of pore-clogging, embarrassing blackheads. Try VACUTEX for 10 days. We guarantee it to do all we claim. If you are not completely satisfied your $1.00 will be immediately refunded.
BALLCO PRODUCTS COMPANY, Dept. 65-F
19 W. 44th St., New York 18, New York
☐ Ship C. O. D., I will pay postman, $1.00 plus postage. My $1.00 will be refunded if I am not delighted.
☐ I prefer to enclose $1.00 now and save postage. (Same guarantee as above.)
NAME .....
ADDRESS .....
City & Zone .....
Sorry No C. O. D.'s Outside U. S. A.

KNIGHT IN BUCKSKIN

By HARRISON Mc ELWAINE

"D'Aulnay! D'Aulnay!" The hated name was on every lip of the stockade's small band of defenders—men and women whose strength and courage was helping to brighten the blackest page in the fair history of Acadia.

THROUGH the fringe of spruce that rimmed the edge of the bluff, a white man and an Indian stepped simultaneously. A moment they stood there leaning into the gusty sea breeze, their eyes narrowed against the glitter of sunlight dancing on the water far below. Then the white man inched cautiously to the edge and peered down.

Instinctively, he grounded his long-bar-

The officer swung the girl aside and stepped forward.

relled musket against the pull of the sheer hundred-foot drop.

Gratefully, Paul Rainsford swept off his coonskin cap and lifted his dark, tanned face to the refreshing wind. It ballooned his buckskin shirt, caressed his sweat-dampened body with cooling fingers that seemed to massage the trail weariness from his tired limbs. He stamped his moccasined feet as though ridding himself of a physical burden and turned his twinkling blue eyes on the young Indian who was leaning on a muzzle of his musket staring intently at a spot far down and off to the West.

There, just beyond a tiny island, where the foam-flecked waters of the Saint John River met to form a junction with the salt water of a natural land-locked harbor, a trading post nestled. Snug and comfortable it looked to their eyes; and, too, their critical inspection noted its safety from attack. It was vulnerable only from the sea.

"Fort LaTour, Little Beaver," Paul spoke in soft Algonquin, "and the end of a long journey. There will be good talk below, and tobacco, and food. The trail has made me very hungry. Come!" He cradled the long rifle in his arms and took a tentative step toward a narrow path that wound down the slope.

But the Indian was still leaning forward squinting his dark eyes against the sun glare. Now he cupped a hand over his eyes squinting until they were but two slits in his coppery face. And Paul Rainsford, seeing him thus, ran lightly back to where the Indian stood.

"What is it, Little Beaver?"

The Indian swung up a bronzed arm and pointed toward the stockade.

"See!" he clipped gutturally. "There has been a fight!"

Now Paul could pick out the gaping breaches where the logs of the palisade sagged drunkenly. Here and there the blackened ruins of burned cabins made sinister brown patches against the green grass.

"Cannon made those breaches in the palisade wall." Paul said at last. "But who would attack LaTour here? England and France are not at war just now, and the French have a monoply on the fur trade in Acadia. Surely—" he turned puzzled eyes on the Indian's inscrutable face—"surely, with so much here for all, the French have not reached the point of fighting among themselves?"

"Perhaps white man steal from white man." The Indian uttered his nearest approach to a laugh—a short guttural sound that resembled a dry, hacking cough. And when he spoke again it was not in the soft tongue of his own people but in halting, broken English, his thin lips parted slightly to reveal his strong white teeth locked in a savage grin.

"Maybe white man steal from white man. White man kill his own kind, then all this will belong to the Redman again!" His dark eyes were gleaming with a fanatical fire as he swept a bronzed arm around in an all-enveloping circle.

HE was a splendid specimen of manhood. A scant inch below Rainsford's six foot two he was naked save for a short beaded sporran and high, laced moccasins. His arms were scarred with the marks of many battles, and he carried himself as befitted a warrior. Across his bronze back where the muscles rippled like steel cords were crisscrossed the buckskin thongs which supported a powder horn and a bullet pouch. In his broad leather belt were tomahawk and sheath knife both ground to razor keenness, while around his neck scarcely concealing the warrior's scars on his broad chest hung his medicine bag. He was a proud son of a proud race, scion of Great Beaver, Chief of all the Algonquins and, for all his youth, already a mighty warrior in his own right.

Paul touched his shoulder in silent sympathy. The greedy fingers of unscrupulous fur companies were probing deeper into this virgin treasure house. Furs, furs and still more furs was the cry of the rich merchants. And always the Redman was the loser regardless of who ruled, English or French. Cheated, exploited, betrayed, their natural bent for trade dulled by cheap liquor, the Indians saw their doom. Paul sympathized deeply with the Redskins though not with the methods they sometimes used in retaliation. Once again he squeezed the shoulder of Little Beaver in silent understanding. The touch seemed to break the spell. As if ashamed of having exposed his feelings, Little Beaver wheeled sharply and strode away.

Behind him, Paul fell into stride, the low-hanging branches swinging noiselessly back into place as the path flowed backward beneath their moccasins. They were half way down the bluff, skirting a deep ravine when the high-pitched scream of a woman knifed through the woods.

The two men whipped from the trail and vanished into the thick brush. Ten feet apart, their passage no more than a whisper of sound, they stalked the source of that nerve-chilling scream. Paul held his long rifle ready, but Little Beaver clutched a throwing tomahawk in his right hand as he went forward his keen eyes searching the underbrush ahead for the flicker of movement that might mark an ambush.

The forests of Acadia in 1645 was no place for carelessness. A man's span of life might well be measured by his watchfulness, his accuracy with the long rifle and his ability with tomahawk and knife. Twice in the past week Paul and Little Beaver had clashed with roving bands of Micmacs.

The woman's scream came again. Paul threw caution to the winds and plowed recklessly through the trees. The Indian grunted disapproval but still he bounded

after his friend who with outflung arms guarding his face ripped through a barrier of brush. Together, they broke through into a small grassy clearing.

Dropping his rifle on the grass, Paul leaped toward the girl struggling in the arms of a burly man in uniform.

Neither of them were aware of his presence until his hard fist whipped over the man's left shoulder and cracked with stinging force against the man's thick lips. He staggered back, arms swinging wildly and only Paul's lightning clutch at the girl saved her as the uniformed man missed his grip and went down heavily.

He rolled over mouthing curses and shaking his shaggy head vigorously to clear it. When he saw the girl in the arms of Paul he scrambled erect, tugging at a heavy-hilted sabre. Paul had just time for a single glance at a lovely face framed in a wealth of auburn hair. Two startled brown eyes met the admiring gaze of his blue ones for an instant, then he swung her lightly to one side. He was alone then facing the gleaming sword.

The man was a soldier, Paul saw. An officer. Resplendent in a dark green tunic, heavily braided, he carried two heavy cavalry pistols in a broad white belt about his waist. Brown corded breeches were tucked loosely into high-topped black leather service boots. His silver-mounted boot buckles jingled musically as he moved forward.

Rainsford dropped back a step, his right hand falling to his knife as he read murder in the man's blazing eyes and in the thick stained lips curled back in a snarl.

Knife against sword!

Paul looked back to where he had tossed his musket. No use. The man would skewer him before he travelled a yard. Cursing himself for dropping the gun he whipped out his sheath knife and prepared to meet the attack.

Behind the man and to his right, Little Beaver was standing his war hatchet poised for a throw.

The swordsman saw the grin on Paul's face and some instinct must have warned him. He stopped, half turned and gaped at the menacing figure in the breech clout. His left hand dropped to the pistol butt.

"Don't do it, mon ami," Paul warned him in French. "Pull that pistol and you are a dead man. At fifty paces that Algonquin can pin a running squirrel to a limb. He could scarcely miss such a thick head as yours."

Paul turned his back and went for his rifle. Picking it up, he walked to take his stand beside the Indian. Little Beaver lowered his arm as Paul's musket muzzle swung into a line with the swordsman's thick stomach.

THE soldier's face became purple. He swallowed hard. He could not afford to lose face before the watching girl . . .

"Put up your weapons!" he thundered. Then, gaining confidence from the sound of his own voice, he waved the sword threateningly.

"You insolent dogs! I'll have the hides flayed from your backs."

A swish of skirts and the girl was before him, her back to Paul. "Please, Capitaine Boudreau," her voice was low, pleading. "They meant no harm. Let them go, please. Haven't we trouble enough already?"

"No!" Boudreau roared. "I demand satisfaction for that blow, and by the devil's beard I'll have it! I'll—hoh!" He exulted as three soldiers marched up the path muskets at the carry position. "Men! Seize these two and take them to the fort. I'll deal with them later."

Obediently the three trotted forward thumbing back the hammers of their muskets as they spread out to make a flank attack. Slowly Paul and Little Beaver, their own weapons ready, backed into the brush that bordered the little clearing. Once in the rolling timber they could easily lose these blundering Colonials until Capitaine Boudreau came to his senses. But would he? Paul Rainsford had to get down to Fort LaTour, and in a hurry. Many things depended upon it. But he must get there . . .

"Wait!" He flung up a hand, palm out.

The soldiers hesitated, glanced back at Boudreau for further instructions.

"You, Boudreau, demanded satisfaction from me. Very well, I'll give you that chance—anyway you choose. But on one condition."

"Name it," cried Boudreau eagerly.

"If I win, we go free. If I lose—" Paul

shrugged, "We hand over our weapons and go to the Fort with you."

The Officer's yellow-flecked eyes glinted evilly as he inspected the other's worn buckskin. An ignorant coureur-de-bois, eh? An easy victim. "You won't be going anywhere, you dog!" He jerked a sword from a soldier's belt and tossed it.

Paul caught it deftly by the hilt, flexed it, then stuck it in the ground before him while he removed his powder horn and bullet pouch and tightened his belt.

"Non, non!" It was the girl sobbing softly as the soldiers caught and held her when she would have ran between the duelists. "It is murder! He is no expert swordsman like you, Capitaine. Let him go. Please."

Boudreau was grinning. No fencing here to feel an opponent's steel—this would be swift, and a great pleasure.

Paul fell into position, every nerve tense in his lithe body as he saw the supreme confidence on Boudreau's face. The Capitaine saluted mockingly as he straightened up.

"You will sleep tonight in Hell, forest runner," he jeered and swept in behind a dazzling display of swordsmanship. Paul was instantly forced back as the glittering blade flicked toward him. Only the fleetest of footwork saved him as Boudreau continued his deadly attack.

He knew his defence to be awkward for it had been many a long month since he had held such a blade. But awkward or not, the defence was there and the Capitaine's blade could not penetrate it. Slowly, Paul began to get the feel of the heavy weapon and strength and skill seemed to suddenly pour into his sword arm. A surprised oath was forced from Boudreau as his desperate lunges were neatly parried and he found himself suddenly on the defensive.

A circle of steel glittered about his face, a jarring pull on his shoulder and an epaulet leaped from the green tunic; a moment later and the gleaming point slid past his guard, speared for his throat. Involuntarily, a harsh scream rasped from his dry throat. A grayish pallor tinged his ruddy cheeks as a button was snipped off an inch below his jugular. Time and again that gleaming point came to a stop magically just when it should have drawn his life's blood, and all the time the laughing blue eyes beneath a tattered coonskin cap mocked his every attempt to retaliate.

The Capitaine sensed that he was being played with. He tossed caution to the wind and began a desperate attack in a last determined effort to break through his opponent's guard. But the buckskin-clad figure pirouetted into a curious twisting lurch to the left and Boudreau, cutting wildly, missed, felt a bone-wracking jerk on his sword and saw his weapon flying through the air to light on the grass a dozen feet away. Off balance, he stumbled forward, a moccasined foot was thrust between his legs and he fell heavily on his face.

The same foot thudded against his chest when he turned over and attempted to rise. With a sharp oath he shoved it aside. A sword point took its place, pricked his jugular. Boudreau cringed. Looking up the length of the blade and beyond the arm that held it steady, he saw no mercy in the set face of the man he had figured on killing so easily.

II

"MON DIEU!" he cried hoarsely. "Would you kill an unarmed man."

"I might," Paul lowered the point a trifle. "If you don't apologize to the lady and then order your ruffians to set her free."

"Very well," Boudreau said thickly. He swung his head to the girl. "My apology to you, Mademoiselle Du Gerdy."

Paul nodded, stepped back and permitted him to arise. The soldiers released the girl and started for Paul, but Boudreau waved them back.

"The forest runner and the Indian go free. Jacques Boudreau keeps his word, but"—he jerked his rumpled tunic down with a savage gesture—"I haven't finished with you yet."

Rainsford grinned as he tossed the sword back to its owner, then, rifle in hand, he stepped across the clearing and bowed courteously to the girl.

"Would mademoiselle permit me to escort her back to the Fort?" His admiring gaze brought a deeper tinge to the warm olive of her cheeks, and some of the fear

left her eyes as she looked up to meet his quiet smile. With a graceful little curtsy, she accepted the arm he proferred and started forward.

"I am Catharine Du Gerdy." And there was a proud little lift to her regal head. As though, Paul thought, she expected him to know that fact without being told. He bent his head from his great height the better to hear her soft French. It was the sweetest music he had ever heard. "My uncle is the Comte de LaTour. In his name I welcome you to Fort LaTour."

Paul Rainsford gazed down at the brown curls that scarcely came to his shoulder and tried hard to keep his mind on the business that had brought him to this frontier outpost.

"This Capitaine Boudreau," he asked. "Who and what is he?"

"He is in charge of twenty soldiers sent here from Quebec City. He has always been insolent, but today is the first time that he—" She broke off in confusion, her eyes lifting swiftly to his face.

Paul scarcely heard her words. He found himself gazing into the deepest brown eyes he had ever seen. With a mighty effort he managed to keep from getting lost altogether and shifted his gaze to the remainder of the picture. It was framed in a mass of glorious brown hair tied in the back with two dainty blue bows. Her lips were full and red and parted slightly to reveal perfect teeth. It was a face for a man to engrave on his heart forever; to carry with him into the wilds where memories live in the glowing embers of lonely camp fires; it was a face to haunt a man's dreams.

For a long moment she met his gaze frankly, then her long lashes covered her eyes. She lifted her hand from his arm, began a nervous fumbling with some beadwork on the front of her dress.

"Forgive me, mademoiselle." Paul bowed to her with old-world grace. "It has been many, many months since I've seen a pretty face, and never one half so lovely as yours. I count myself honored to have been of some service to you. I am"—his hesitation was infinitesimal, but the girl glanced up quickly—"I am Paul Rainsford, a forest runner, as Boudreau said. Behind is my friend and ally, Little Beaver, the son of an Algonquin Chief."

ABOUT fifty feet square, the palisade surrounded a collection of log huts laid out in the form of a long blockhouse: a fort within a fort; a harbour of refuge for the Indians and the trappers whose huts and tents sprawled over the cleared expanse between the Fort and the nearby woods. In the distance could be heard the dull roar of the falls where the mighty Saint John River narrowed down to pour through a narrow gorge.

As Paul's eyes roamed here and there, his lips pursed in a soft whistle as he saw the gaping vents in the palisade, the overturned cannon and the fresh bullet scars on the peeled logs of the rambling blockhouse.

"D'Aulnay's work," the girl explained. "Twice in the past month he has attacked us, but each time we have managed to beat him off." She looked out to sea and sighed deeply. "We expect another attack soon, and I'm afraid we won't be so lucky this time."

"But why? Why should D'Aulnay attack LaTour? Are they not both lieutenants of the King of France in Acadia?"

She shrugged, her eyes resentful as she lifted them to gaze out across the Bay where distant blue hills broke the horizon. Off there lay Port Royal stronghold of the Chevalier D'Aulnay and from which he was evidently making a determined effort to become master of this new land.

"I do not know why he should choose to attack us," said Catharine. "There is plenty of room and furs for both; but since the death of Governor Rasilly, D'Aulnay seems determined to drive my uncle out of Acadia."

Behind, Little Beaver loosed a deep, significant grunt. Paul half turned to cast a warning glance at him; but the little byplay was lost on the girl. With a glad little cry she left Paul's side and ran to greet a portly, red-faced little man who came waddling around the end of a blockhouse. He was clad in the flowing garb of a Jesuit; but he had evidently laid aside his crucifix in exchange for the axe slung over his shoulder. His long black robe, tied knee-high with a rough leather thong, left his long, lean hairy shanks exposed to the sly hilarity of the coureur-de-bois and the woodsmen who paused a moment in their race against darkness to chuckle

at the picture made by their Father Confessor.

Paul, watching, saw the cheery smile leave the Jesuit's face as Catharine stepped close to him and spoke. He lifted his cowled head and regarded Paul with a long, searching glance nodding his head the while in confirmation to something which the girl was saying. Finally, he beckoned Paul to him.

"I am Father Dominique," he said as Rainsford came up. His voice was deep, resonant—a big voice for such a fat little man. But his hands were rough, calloused, and his handshake was firm and friendly. He said: "Catharine tells me you saved her from some unpleasantness just now. I, too, thank you. How are you named?"

"Paul Rainsford."

"Rainsford? Hm-m!" Father Dominique plucked at his pudgy lower lip with a stubby forefinger. His beady black eyes searched Paul's face as though he would read in the blue eyes and the tanned skin with its untidy covering of beard the answer to that which seemed to be puzzling him. "And why are you here, Rainsford?"

"Perhaps I am a knight seeking my spurs, Father." The blue eyes seemed utterly devoid of guile as Paul lowered his head to smile down into the chubby face. "Perhaps—perhaps, I make it a habit of rescuing lovely maidens in distress and aiding beleaguered garrisons."

"Hoh!" Little Beaver grunted loudly at Paul's elbow. "No more talk! We get food. Come!"

Paul gave him a grateful glance. Sometimes, in the stress of the moment, a man can talk too much, drop a seemingly insignificant word and undo the work of months. With a careless salute to the Jesuit, he followed the girl across the hard-packed earth, up a short flight of stone steps and into a large, comfortably-furnished room.

The bareness of the log walls was relieved by mounted trophies. Beautiful specimens of Indian fancywork enriched with their gorgeous coloring. Beaver pelts, soft as a woman's hair, covered the puncheon floor, muffled the girl's footsteps as she ran lightly toward a regal-looking woman who was writing at an improvised desk set close under the room's single window. Behind her a huge stone fireplace jutted out from the log wall, and in its gaping mouth, beach wood burned with a pleasant crackling.

At the girl's touch, the woman lifted her head. Paul saw the face of a middle-aged woman. She was beautiful, yet worry had left its mark on her features.

She listened intently as Catharine spoke swiftly, then her sad face was lighted up with a swift smile. She rose and swept forward holding out a hand to Paul Rainsford. It was an exquisite hand, adorned with a priceless diamond ring set side by side with a plain gold wedding ring. It was the hand of a great lady and over it the roughly-clad forester bowed with all the grace of a courtier. And the bewilderment of Catharine Du Gerdy increased as she watched.

"I am Madame LaTour, and I welcome you to our post, Monsieur Rainsford." Her voice held a note of power that told him that here, in this stately woman, was the real driving force behind LaTour's ambitions in Acadia. "And I also wish to add my thanks to those of my niece for your gallant aid today. That Boudreau!"—she stamped her foot—"I have reached the end of my patience with that lout!" She stormed past them with a swish of skirts, her shoulders set determinedly as she hurried from the room.

"La, la!" Catharine laughed gaily. "She will not find him. Mon brave Capitaine would rather face your sword again, M'sieu Rainsford than my aunt's tongue when she is angry. But, come—I forget my hospitality. You are hungry? Good!" She glanced around swiftly. "Your Indian friend seems to have vanished, so you will take supper with us and perhaps you will tell me where you learn the manners of a courtier and how you become such a swordsman that you so easily disarm Capitaine Jacques Boudreau, the finest duellist in the New World. You will tell me all that, eh?"

FOR three days Paul Rainsford wandered freely about Fort LaTour, lending a hand here and there, and by a cautious questioning of trappers and woodsmen he learned that LaTour's position in this portion of the new land was a precarious one indeed. Many of the

garrison had deserted and gone over to D'Aulnay during the last attack. Now, the defenders, weakened by the loss of some of the best men, were hurrying to prepare for another attack.

The handful of soldiers who formed the military of the garrison made no attempt to lend a hand with the heavy drudgery of hewing palisade posts or raising embankments. Instead, they strutted pompously under the pretense of keeping a guard on the huge gate.

Paul mentioned this one night a week later to Catharine as the two of them strolled arm in arm.

"The soldiers were sent to us from Quebec—a high government official there is financially interested in my uncle's post. He thought the uniformed men would have a restraining effect on the Indians—but he didn't count D'Aulnay into his calculations. You see, Paul, my uncle is very much dependent on the help of the rich merchants in Boston. He has been there now for over a month seeking money; and he should be back soon. In the meantime, D'Aulnay has taken advantage of his absence to attack us. So far, we have managed to beat him off. But we are desperate. This place means so much to my aunt and uncle—and to me. My parents died in France a year ago, and I was sent out here as a ward of Madame LaTour. She is distantly related to my parents, but I call them Aunt and Uncle. It pleases them. And for their sakes, I can overlook many things, even—Capitaine Boudreau. He is a good soldier; and we need every man and every weapon."

She found a seat on a mossy log near the trail. Paul dropped to a seat beside her. For the first time in many days he felt utterly at ease. He was freshly shaven, his shaggy locks had been trimmed and his trail-worn buckskin washed and mended by the wife of a friendly trapper. Little Beaver, off on a scout for information which would aid Paul's mission, should be back on the morrow. There would be plenty of work to do then. But for the moment, he wanted to forget his mission; forget the endless questioning of white men, squaws and Indians; forget the Jesuit and his obvious attempts to lure him into conversation. He turned to look at the lovely girl who sat beside him and, as he turned, his face almost brushed her hair so that the fragrance of it in his nostrils was like the heady draft of new wine.

A tender smile was on her lips, such a light of love blazed from these eyes that his heart almost ceased its beating.

"Catharine, ma belle," he began. "I—I—"

And, suddenly, she was in his arms warm, vibrant, her soft mouth quivering against his. Her arms stole up haltingly at first, then, as his hard lips demanded more, they tightened around his neck in a passionate grip.

For a moment she clung to him. Then she fought against the grip of his mighty arms. He relaxed his grip slightly and permitted her to lean back. Through her parted lips her breath sobbed in short, sharp gasps.

"Ma foi, my Paul. What a big bear you are! Would you crush my ribs, then? Do you not know that even a girl as much in love as I am has to breathe. I—"

He stopped the words with a kiss as he caught her to him again, holding her tightly, murmuring tender words against the silken fragrance of her glorious hair.

"And I do love you, Paul," she whispered against his mouth. "I've loved you since the moment you came to my aid in the forest." She sat up sharply, a smile on her lips. "That's it—you were like a knight coming to the rescue of a maid in distress. You have no armour, but—I shall call you my 'Knight in Buckskin'."

"Very pretty!"

At the sound of that coarse voice, Catharine broke from Paul's embrace and leaped to her feet. Paul rolled in the opposite direction and came erect facing Boudreau. He bulked large in the half darkness. Stocky legs spread far apart, the Capitaine stood with folded arms, his thick lips curled in a sneer.

"Very pretty! Knight in Buckskin, indeed. Ho! Ho! Ho!"

A mounting rage at the man filmed Paul's eyes with red. He started a fist toward that sneering face; but the blow was checked by Catharine's fingers on his arm.

"No!" she said sharply. "No more fighting."

Boudreau dropped a hand to his belt.

"I'm in command here, forest runner. I don't want you to take Mademoiselle Du Gerdy outside the palisade after dark again. Understand?"

"No, I don't!" Paul snapped. "I'm not one of your garrison and, besides, since when have you appointed yourself the guardian of M'selle?"

The pistol appeared in Boudreau's hand.

"Mother of God!" he bellowed. "My orders will be obeyed. Do you obey them, forest runner, or shall I shoot you down here and now for a mutinous dog and throw your body to the river eels?" The pistol muzzle swung up to a level with Paul's eyes.

Catharine stepped out before him and with the grim muzzle almost touching her brown hair, she curtsied to the Capitaine.

"We're both very sorry, m'sieu." She was very humble. "It will not happen again. I promise you that. Come, Paul." Hand in hand they walked slowly down the trail and across the clearing to the stockade gate. Far off, the surf boomed like muted war drums, but here in the old Fort the watch fires blazed like friendly eyes and a man sang softly, a simple, plaintive melody of a homeland far away across the seas.

At the door of her cabin, Paul clutched Catharine to him again. She slid from his arms.

"Ma foi!" she cried. "What an impatient lover!" Her slim hands against his broad chest held him off. "And where will you carry me off to, my lover?" Her searching eyes were fixed on his face. "The trapper has his cabin, and the knight his castle. But you are neither of those. Or—are you?" She finished slowly. Her questing eyes invited an answer if her lips did not ask it direct.

And Paul Rainsford thought of the great home that could be his and the place in court that was his by rightful due, and he opened his mouth to speak. But the secret that was not his to impart locked his lips. With a low moan, he bent his head against her hair.

"I understand, Paul." She whispered. "You will tell me your secret when you are ready. I will be waiting." Her goodnight kiss was a tender promise that lingered on his lips as she ran up the stone steps.

"Until tomorrow, my Paul." Her voice came to him softly.

III

THE STOCKADE was blanketed deep in a clammy land fog the next morning as Paul finished his breakfast and hurried to keep his rendezvous with Little Beaver. The Algonquin was due to meet him near the Falls and Paul hoped he would have some information.

Shadowy figures were hurrying back and forth in response to shouted orders from the overseer. Axes rang out as unseen workmen somewhere in the mist rushed the last of the repairs to the stockade. Even the stoic Indians seemed to have thrown off their usual lethargy and were lending a hand here and there to erect the barrier against the common foe.

"D'Aulnay! D'Aulnay!" The hated name was on every lip. "A forest runner brings the news. The Chevalier is going to attack before the week is out." And that leaves but two days, Paul thought.

On a home-made carriage, a cannon inched across the uneven ground, the crude wooden wheels shrieking protestingly as Indians, squaws and trappers bent their backs to the "Heave-ho!" of a stalwart woodsman.

"Put your backs into it!" he yelled. "Name of a devil, but we will give the Chevalier a warm welcome this time."

Paul dodged through groups of woodsmen and Indians. Almost through the huge gate, he collided heavily with a huge figure that loomed so suddenly in his path that neither of them had time to doodge.

Both men staggered from the impact: Paul, against the gate; the other, a bearded giant as tall as Paul himself, kept his balance by superb footwork.

"Parblieu!" Paul gasped. "This accursed fog. It blinds a man." He would have gone on with a short apology, but an extended arm blocked his path. Glittering eyes peering from under bushy brows swept Paul's face with a searching gaze. Suddenly, like a man remembering something long forgotten, the bearded one snapped his fingers.

"Attendez!" he roared to a passing group of laborers. "This young cockerel is a spy! I, myself, saw him in D'Aulnay's camp not a month past."

As one man, the defenders of the Fort surged around the two. Paul was roughly crowded against the log palisade. His musket was wrenched from his hand; a hand plucked his knife from his belt. War hatchets and long knives flashed threateningly as the circle of grim-faced men narrowed.

"A spy! Hang him! Hang him up for the Chevalier to see when he comes!"

"Make way here!"

Boudreau's thick voice roared above the confusion and Indians, coureur-de-bois, trappers and soldiers drew back to make way for his hulking form. Roughly, he breasted a path through the inner ring and stopped short to glare belligerently at Paul who was held by two husky trappers.

"What's going on here?" The Capitaine demanded.

"A spy, mon Capitaine! Black Jules claims this man is a spy of the Chevalier."

"Oui, oui, M'sieu!" The black-bearded one nodded vigorously. "I saw him talking and eating meat with the Chevalier in Port Royal when you sent me there to spy—"

"Hang him!"

The shrill cry ripped from the throat of a tall trapper. The crowd took it up in a roar of rage. Redskins, the blood lust on them, joined in the demand with piercing warwhoops as they brandished tomahawks and knives. The mob surged in on Boudreau and hurled him against the palisade. Though he fought to guard him from the lynchers, Paul could easily see that his struggle was for appearances only. So he was not too much surprised when the Capitaine was brushed aside.

His own struggles were useless. Strong hands bound him. He was carried toward a gun carriage and hóisted aloft. By an effort he managed to keep his balance on the smooth iron of the breech. Other hands quickly rigged a long pole across the palisade. A rope was deftly flung over and in another moment he was standing on his toes as the coarse hemp tightened about his throat.

With desperate eyes he searched the sea of upturned faces. Eyes, hot with hatred glared back at him; bearded lips parted as men spat their contempt for D'Aulnay's spy. Men who had been his friends an hour ago now clamored for his death. They crowded closer as more arrivals, attracted by the shouting, joined the circle yelling for information and, when they got it, lifting their voices to swell the paean of hate.

An unholy gleam shone in Boudreau's eyes as he swaggered about the improvised gibbet with a great show of holding back the more insistent ones who would have jerked Paul's toes from their precarious perch.

"In a moment, my impatient ones," he chuckled. "We must be just in this matter and—"

Black Jules gave the rope a tentative jerk and Paul grunted involuntarily as the deadly pressure cut off his breath. Madly he fought to clear his bound hands, to claw at this rope which was starving his lungs of precious, life-giving air.

"Boudreau," he croaked hoarsely. "Give me a chance to explain."

"Hah!" The Capitaine pounded his thick thigh in huge glee. "He begs for mercy. Loose the rope a trifle more, my Jules, and let us hear how our brave forest runner whines for his life. It will be sweet music. Come, mon ami, we are all listening."

AS the rope slackened, Paul sucked damp air into his starved lungs. With each breath came new courage. They would not hear him beg for mercy, these hard-faced pioneers, who, themselves, lived and died by the stern code of the savage wilderness.

He lifted his eyes and saw the mist purple before the first slanting golden rays as dawn trembled in the East. The sun was just behind the bluff, he figured, and soon the lacy curtain of mist would lift and vanish and the stage would be set for a new day. But he would not see it. It was hard to die now: no more to roam the shadowy coolness of the forest aisles, to feel the wind on his face and the sting of salt water on his tingling flesh; to feel the full surge and lift of his splendid being as the gage of battle was thrown down and he matched strength for strength in physical combat. And a little sob choked him as Catharine's sweet face came before his eyes with her soft red lips and the unspoken promises in her glorious eyes . . .

"Stretch him!" Boudreau bellowed.

The jerk of the rope blotted out her picture.

Frantically he stretched his body to ease the fearful strain, felt it slacken slightly, then the full pressure came again as a musket butt knocked his feet from the cannon barrel.

Muscular reaction sent his body into a whirling spin as a ribbon of fire cased his throat, tightened, burned its way down into his lungs. He surged upward, swinging his feet up in a futile effort to take the weight from his neck muscles. Dimly he heard the roars of the crowd. Then a shrill whistling scream seemed to howl through his brain, gathering momentum until it finally burst in a blaze of fire that seemed to rob him of all pain. He sank deep into a soft, velvety blackness . . .

MUTED voices penetrated slowly through the welter of pain that held Paul Rainsford in its grip. He knew he was alive, for he could feel the throbbing agony of tortured muscles searing his aching body. But his attempts to move his limbs were baffled by a strange lethargy. Even his eyes refused to obey the command of his brain, and he could only lie there in a world of blackness so thick he could almost feel it.

"This is war." A man's voice, trembling with suppressed rage, cut in on a woman's swift flow of passionate words. "This is war, and I was but doing my duty in hanging a spy."

"You've exceeded your authority, Mon Capitaine." The clear tones stirred Paul to renewed efforts to break the spell that held him. "My Uncle shall have something to say about this when he returns." Catharine's voice seemed like a hand in the darkness reaching down to lift him from the depths. The barrier of blackness suddenly lifted. Paul opened his eyes.

The speakers were out of his range of vision, but in trying to twist his head to see them, his neck muscles, wracked by the cruel rope, stabbed such agony through him that he groaned.

Instantly, she was by his side and the lovely face he had so nearly lost filled his vision. She bent to kiss him, stroking back his long hair with cool fingers.

"Oh, my Paul," she sobbed, "What have they done to you?"

He reached for her hands.

"I—I don't remember much," he croaked the words painfully. His eyes roved over the meagre furnishings of the rough hut, came to rest on the leering visage of Boudreau. Behind the Capitaine and to his left Little Beaver, arms folded, stood like a bronze statue, his glittering eyes fixed on the stocky Capitaine who stood just inside the half open door.

"Mademoiselle Du Gerdy ordered you cut down—and against my orders." Boudreau snapped away from the wall as he spoke. He clumped toward the bunk. "Your damn Indian saved your life; and he's crippled three of my best men doing it." His thick lips curled. "Naturally, she doesn't believe you're a spy. But I do, and—" He caressed the butt of his pistol suggestively as he sprawled on a rough deal table and stared down at Paul.

Catharine intruded herself so as to block Paul's view of that sneering face. "No, my Paul," she said, and her eyes were filled with a great love and faith. "I don't believe you are a spy. And this man will pay for his attempt to murder you."

Boudreau shrugged, extending his palms out in a silent gesture of resignation. "I was but merely doing my duty," he repeated wearily. "I thought that if he is a spy I might frighten valuable information from him. I did not mean to hang him." His cruel eyes belied his sanctimonious pose.

Paul pulled the girl closer. "I'm no spy, ma belle. I want you to believe it—"

"We will—if you prove it, monsieur!" broke in a new voice from the doorway.

Boudreau straightened to his feet as Madame LaTour swished across the room to the bunk. Near the foot of it she stopped and stood twisting slender fingers in a thin gold neckchain. She surveyed Paul with coldly impersonal eyes—the eyes of one disbelieving, yet willing to be convinced by any reasonable explanation.

Paul dropped Catharine's hands and reached for the water gourd on a bench near the bunk. He drank slowly under the watchful gaze of four pairs of eyes, taking his time because the ice-cold water was a magic nectar to his inflamed throat muscles and, too, the operation gave him time to think.

He was in a ticklish spot. A wrong

move might cause him to be placed back on that cannon barrel—with nobody to cut him down this time. If only IaTour were here. But Le Comte, as Paul well knew, was in New England dickering with the shrewd merchants there for a loan with which to buy cannon and to import more men to further strengthen his position in Acadia. And while he was away, his rival was hacking away the very foundations upon which LaTour hoped to build. While Paul ruminated the portly figure of Father Dominique sidled in and took his place at the side of Madame LaTour.

"Come!" she demanded at last. "We are impatient. We are waiting for your explanation, monsieur."

The rude hut had suddenly become a court of law with Madame as the judge; Catharine, the defense counsel; Paul, the prisoner on trial for his life; and Boudreau, the executioner who eagerly awaited the word that would deliver the forest runner back into his hands. On the loyalty of Little Beaver, Paul could count without question. But Father Dominique—which way, Paul wondered, did the little Jesuit intend to cast his vote.

"Black Jules is right," Paul said at last. "I did stay in Port Royal for a few days; but only to rest from a long trip which Little Beaver and I had just finished. From there, we have been nearly a month in crossing the Isthmus to get to Fort LaTour."

"Why?" Boudreau sneered. "You might have crossed in a much shorter period with D'Aulnay when he came to attack us."

"Please!" Catharine whirled on him. "Let us hear him out. Go on, Paul."

Paul looked straight into the calm eyes of Madame LaTour.

"I said my name is Rainsford. Does the name suggest anything to you, Madame?"

SUDDENLY, her fingers tightened on the gold chain. For the first time Paul saw a flicker of interest in her pale blue eyes. Before she could speak, the Jesuit leaned forward.

"There is a Rainsford in Boston," he said slowly. "Le Comte expects to do business with him—" His beady eyes suddenly widened in disbelief. "You—you, are not?"

"I am," Paul grinned mockingly as he watched the Jesuit struggling with the revelation that had just dawned. "Lord Michael Rainsford is my father and unless I report back to him, LaTour won't get a penny from the Boston merchants."

"A spy after all, eh?" Boudreau yelled. "I say, hang him. A spy is a spy whether he works for the Boston men or for D'Aulnay—"

Madame's firm hand against his chest checked his flow of hot words.

"You fool!" Her eyes blazed. "You fool! Lord Rainsford is one of the most powerful nobles in England; certainly the most powerful man in the New England Colonies. If this man is his son Rainsford would send his ships of war here instantly if we harmed him—knowingly or otherwise." Her eyes were calm again, thoughtful, as she turned to regard Paul. "If what you say is true, Monsieur, it lies in your power to make or to break my husband's mission in Boston."

"But your clothing, Paul." Catharine broke in before Paul could answer. "One would expect something different from—from a Lord's son. Why do you choose to travel this way when you could come in state as the representative of monied interests?" He laughed gaily at her puzzlement.

"As a coureur-de-bois with an Indian companion, I attract no attention and I can travel faster. You see," he went on to explain. "Lord Rainsford isn't really my father. My real parents were immigrant pioneers to New England. They were killed by raiding Iroquois years ago. Somehow, the raiders overlooked me in my cradle and I was found by a band of friendly Algonquins and adopted by the squaw of their chief, Great Beaver. I grew up with his son, Little Beaver who stands behind you now. Later, when the Chief visited Boston, Lord Rainsford and his wife saw me and bought me from the Indian to take the place of his only son who was drowned.

"I was taken to England and educated there in his great house in Hampshire. But my knowledge of Indians and trading and trapping was such that I persuaded my father to send me back to New England to be his representative there. I have taken many journeys into the wilderness and it was on my father's business that I came to Acadia to look into the situation here.

Before he invests more money in LaTour's trading interests Lord Rainsford requires certain information. In all matters of this sort he trusts my judgment implicitly."

"And your judgment in this case?" Madame leaned forward, her lips compressed.

"That is for the ears of Lord Rainsford alone," Paul said coldly. He knew that he had won. He had gained precious time. Over the head of the Jesuit he saw the face of Little Beaver. On that coppery, enigmatic visage was the nearest approach to a smile that Paul had ever seen. Evidently Little Beaver appreciated the situation and the subtle reasoning by which Paul had turned the tide in their favor.

"Very well, monsieur," Madame LaTour cast her judgment. "Your story is a strange one—but not improbable. I once met your mother, Lady Pauline Rainsford, when she was presented at the French Court. She mentioned an adopted son. Perhaps you are he—but, my husband will know how to deal with this situation when he returns. In the meantime, it will be safer for you to remain here—under guard." She turned to the door. Over her shoulder, she said: "The men are in an ugly mood, Capitaine. They might not credit the story of Monsieur Rainsford. Therefore, I shall hold you personally responsible for his safety. Comprendez?"

"But perfectly, Madame." Boudreau bowed with just a touch of mockery in his eyes. "I shall take excellent care of our noble guest."

"See that you do." Her nod was a warning as she went out. Boudreau followed her. Little Beaver shut the door behind him, then squatted cross-legged in a corner. His eyes closed, his head dropped and he seemed to go instantly asleep. But it was the sleeping watchfulness of a dozing panther. It would be a brave man who would set foot across that doorway. Paul relaxed.

Catharine, who had been sitting back, now bent forward. Her lips brushed his in a tender gesture. Her glowing eyes were the eyes of a woman whose deep faith has been fully justified. "Oh, my Paul," she whispered against his cheek. "I knew it all the time—knew that you were someone great and noble. I called you my Knight in Buckskin and all the time you were a real Knight with a great castle in England."

"I did not mean to deceive you, ma belle. But my secret wasn't mine to disclose. You understand?"

She kissed him again. "I understand, my Paul. But it makes not the slightest difference. A castle in England, a hut in the woods of Acadia; so long as I share it with you. That's all I ask."

And a deep sense of peace filled the heart of Paul Rainsford. The contentment that comes to a man who has reached the end of a long trail.

IV

THAT NIGHT D'Aulnay struck. The thundering blast of a cannon wakened Paul. He swung his long legs off the bunk and whipped to the hut's single window. It wasn't large enough to admit his broad shoulders but he could manage to poke his head out. The palisade loomed less than ten feet in front and by the dull gleam of new timber that formed the extensive repairs he knew that his window faced the water. Twisting his head, he looked down the length of the palisade to his left. Wild activity everywhere.

Muskets flashed as the guards came to life, their shouts drowned by another blast from the unseen cannon. This time Paul heard the dull thud as the ball struck the palisade and a moment later his eardrums were nearly burst as the Fort's artillery answered. Men were running past blowing hoarsely on slow matches, their faces distorted masks of hate in the garish light of musket fire. As his own eyes grew more accustomed to the night, Paul saw other humped shapes along the stockade, their muskets banging a staccato accompaniment to the deeper notes of the cannon.

Through the reek of powder smoke a crouching figure emerged and scuttled across the ground toward the door of Paul's hut. He jerked his head inside. "Little Beaver," he called. And then he saw that the Indian was gone. He looked out again. The running figure was nearer.

Boudreau?

The name flashed instantly into Paul's mind as he drew back from the window. He leaped across the room and crouched to the right of the door. The big Capitaine

was more than capable of creeping in here in the midst of a battle and murdering him. Paul hugged the wall wishing for a knife as he heard the door latch rattle.

As the door creaked back, Paul breathed in relief at the sight of the tall figure that entered.

"Little Beaver!" He grasped the Indian's arm, pulled him inside and closed the door. "Where have you been?"

The Indian grunted. "Here!" He handed Paul his own musket, powder horn and bullet pouch. His knife and war hatchet were thrust into his belt. He shrugged his body against the welcome feel of the weight, then he and the Indian stepped out into a night that was hideous with the banging of muskets, the warwhoops of Indians and the deeper, sullen boom of heavy cannon.

With a soft curse, Paul leaped to the stockade and peered between the uprights, his face taut as he watched the steady flash of muskets from the woods behind the Fort. The balls slapped into the timber with a regularity that told of a large attacking force.

"He's got us surrounded," Paul observed as they made the rounds of the Fort. The line of flashes spread out until they were stabbing toward the Fort from three sides. From the fourth, the water side, he could see the outlines of several ships as the cannon blazed.

A cannonball crashed into the stockade overhead and Paul and the Indian flattened beneath a shower of splinters and shattered timber. "Well," Paul observed as they shook themselves erect. "We're not supposed to mix into any fights here, but that was a personal invitation. Come!" The two moved down the line of men, found a position and soon their own muskets were adding to the terrific din.

There Boudreau found them when dawn grayed the skies and a light morning breeze was scattering the acrid smoke that hung low over the stockade like a foul fog.

His jaw slacked at the sight of Paul and the Indian, smoke-grimed, hunched low trying for a shot at a D'Aulnay sniper who was hidden behind a huge stump.

"You?" He jerked out a pistol. "Get back to your hut!" And when Paul refused to move, Boudreau jammed the weapon against his stomach. A second one appeared in his left hand as Little Beaver made a threatening move. "Both of you! Back to the hut!"

"Don't be a fool, Boudreau," Paul snapped. "You need every musket you can muster."

Boudreau's trigger finger twitched. He was evidently holding his fire only by a mighty effort of will. Paul's own life hung on a thread. A false move and he was a dead man. With a shrug, he dropped his musket motioning for the Indian to do the same. Together, with the muzzles of Boudreau's pistols prodding their backs, they began their march back to the hut.

Rainsford was beginning to think that back of Boudreau's attitude was something more than a mere sense of duty. Did the man hope to get him out of the way so he could have a clear field with Catharine? Or was he mixed up with one of the many political factions that continually kept this land under a state of war.

Twenty paces from the hut, they stepped aside to permit Madame LaTour to pass. She saw the pistols in Boudreau's hands and her eyebrows lifted questioningly.

"What now, Capitaine?" she asked wearily.

"The prisoner escaped, Madame. I'm locking him up again—and his Indian with him."

But Paul held back ignoring the thrust of the pistol muzzle. "You need our muskets, Madame." He stopped her when she would have passed. "I will give parole for both. We promise not to attempt an escape unless D'Aulnay captures the fort."

"Accepted, monsieur." She smiled sadly. "But the parole is hardly needed now." She shuddered as a spent cannon ball thudded against the wall of a cabin and rolled past her feet.

FOR two days the weary garrison repulsed attack after attack as the Chevalier's men rushed the stockade under cover of a murderous fire from his three ships anchored in the river mouth. Cannon hammered incessantly, the heavy metal ripping through the palisade scattering long, spear-sharp splinters to take a frightful toll of the defenders.

Attacking by night, sniping from the treetops throughout the day, the besiegers kept up a nerve-wracking fire from a hun-

dred hidden marksmen until even Little Beaver, flattened beside Paul in the shelter of a shattered hut, grunted impatiently as he watched for the waving branch that would mark the movements of an enemy marksman. But D'Aulnay's men were wily, changing position immediately after each shot so that only a burst of smoke against the leafy greenness presented a target for the defenders' muskets. Balls were finding their way through the cracks in the log uprights and the toll of wounded was mounting steadily. And though anxious-eyed lookouts watched seaward there was still no sign of LaTour's sails.

Of Catharine, Paul had seen little during the siege. She had turned a section of the huge blockhouse into a rough hospital and several times Paul had glimpsed her as she worked out in the open over some man who was too badly wounded to move.

In the night, she came to him. Her lips sought his in the darkness, her own arms tight about his neck. The driving power that had sustained her through the dreadful day now seemed to leave her and she was only a frightened girl as she curled into his arms.

"Tomorrow is Easter, Paul," she said at last. "Perhaps the Chevalier will give us a respite. Too, it would give us another day of grace. My uncle should be back soon."

"D'Aulnay is mad for power." Paul's voice was grim as he surveyed the past few days. "He imagines himself as an emperor in this new land defying even the King of France himself. Hark! His men seem to be celebrating their victory already." They crept to a lookout that gave a full view of the beach.

Huge fires were roaring along the waterfront, the lurid flames leaping higher and higher as the besiegers tossed on armfulls of brush, dancing and singing ribald songs as they disported themselves amidst the showers of sparks. The ruddy gleam of the flames tinged the area of mud left by the outgoing tide, crept farther out across the still water and brought into stark relief the spidery rigging of the ships that tugged gently at their anchors. Around the Fort, on the land side, other fires, smaller ones, blazed with a steadiness that suggested a ring of watchful eyes. Only inside the palisade was there no light, no leaping flames, no laughter, no song. The cooking fires were well-concealed in windowless huts and soft-footed squaws carried hot food to the watchful garrison as they hunkered at their posts. Others, weary with fighting and killing, hunched deep in blankets to snatch what fitful rest they could before the breaking of dawn—and another attack.

And it seemed as if Catharine's prayer was to be answered. As the morning broke before a flaming sun, a great peace seemed to descend on the land. No cannon's fire greeted the men of the garrison as they rose stiffly from their dew-wet blankets, stamping the stiffness from their limbs as they shuffled to their places on the firing steps. Wonderingly they peered forth at the blanketed forms sprawled around the smouldering beach fires. No sniper's bullet came crashing from the surrounding woods as man after man of the garrison raised his head, stepped out with a freedom of movement he had not known for days.

Easter Morning.

Day of thanksgiving and peace. D'Aulnay was keeping the Holy Day! Today, the weary garrison could rest and pray without fear of the cannon's roar or the sniper's bullet screaming from hidden ambush. In twos and threes they filed slowly toward the log chapel where Father Dominique stood arms outspread in benediction as his little flock dropped to their knees on the damp grass.

And no one saw a figure rise stealthily and sidle along the palisade toward the undefended gate. The huge bar slid easily back and the gate creaked slightly as it swung open before a wedge of grim-faced men in buckskin armed with long-barreled muskets. Scattered among them were several scores of nearly naked savages with glistening knives and war hatchets gripped in eager hands. Their gleaming eyes were hot with the bloodlust as they crept closer to their kneeling victims.

Only the outer row of the circle of worshippers could have heard the soft pad of the approaching moccasins, but they died on their knees as D'Aulnay's men, eager for the kill, sent a crashing volley into their bowed forms. It was the signal for the slaughter to begin. Screaming hate, the Chevalier's Indians leaped in swinging tomahawks that were soon dripping with

the blood of men who died before they could swing up a weapon.

Paul, kneeling beside Catharine, had retained his musket. With a rallying cry to a group of nearby trappers, he led a swift counter attack toward the gate. It was too late to shut it, for the traitor had done his foul work well. D'Aulnay's men were still streaming through eager to be in at the death of the gallant little band that had held them at bay for so long.

A CURSING, milling mass of men now filled the interior of the Fort. Too close for shooting, it was hot, hand-to-hand work. Paul clubbed his musket like a flail and a thrill ran through him as he saw the impossible happening before his eyes.

D'Aulnay's men were retreating!

Expecting the slaughter of unarmed men, D'Aulnay's force were unable to face the desperate counter attacks of the garrison. Capitaine Boudreau was no where to be seen. Paul constantly searched for him, but the boastful Frenchman seemed to have vanished. The garrison, recognizing a born leader in the man they were going to hang as a spy, rallied around his tall form and Paul led them in a desperate charge.

With a piercing yell, Little Beaver left Paul's side and the Indians, accepting his leadership, followed his bronzed form in a circling counter attack.

A giant Micmac, his face distorted with fury, rose from the ground and swung a bloody hatchet at Paul's back. He sensed the danger, whirled to meet the blow. A musket butt swung in blotting the Indian's face to a bloody pulp. Across his falling form, Black Jules leaped lightlly. His beard was blood-stained and his dark eyes were alight with the joy of battle. He dropped a hand to Paul's shoulder.

"I was wrong about you, forest runner," he said humbly. "I ask your pardon."

Paul gripped the extended hand. "Granted, Jules. And thanks for that timely blow." Across the body of the dead Indian their hands clasped. Towering head and shoulders above the tallest men their eyes met and locked. Two mighty fighters. One, the adopted son of an English Lord; the other, an ignorant coureur-de-bois. Jules glanced swiftly over Paul's great shoulders, his powerful arms, the lithe body sloping down to lean hips with their runner's legs. He chuckled deep in his black beard.

"We are men, you and I. Come, let us put the fear of God into these scum."

Together they waded into the battle.

Driving the last of the stragglers before them, the garrison finally slammed the gate shut on their heels. The great bar dropped into place with a clang and weary men sank down where they stopped nursing their wounds as best they could while Catharine and Madame went about attending to the more seriously wounded.

But the rest period was short. As the last of the besiegers reached the shelter of the sloping river banks, the guns of the ships began to open fire. Heavy shot ripped into the palisade scattering the defenders to firing positions from which they began to open a musket duel with men hidden along the shore.

"Save your fire!" Boudreau suddenly appeared. "We're getting low on powder. Let them fire away. The stockade will take the brunt of their fire. Some of you stay on guard; the remainder help get the wounded men in out of the sun."

Friend and foe were treated alike by the improvised nursing corps under Catharine. Soon, the square was cleared of wounded men and her little hospital was filled to overflowing. The dead were piled in an empty hut for later burial.

Squaws stirred the smouldering cooking fires to life and soon savory odors were wafted to hungry men. They gathered swiftly, crowding into the crude kitchens helping themselves from the huge pots secure in the knowledge that keen-eyed guards would guard them against another surprise attack.

Paul was hunkered beside Jules eating ravenously when he spied Catharine peering about through the groups of men. Noting the anxious look on her face, he rose and called to her. She ran to him and he laid aside his plate of food, caught her hands in his and pulled her to one side away from the rest.

"What is it, my dear? What's the matter?"

"It's Madame, Paul." Her voice trembled. "She is going to surrender the fort.

Don't let her do it, please. D'Aulnay is not to be trusted."

"I know it," Paul said grimly as he led her to a seat beside Jules. "Wait here."

Ten minutes later he was back.

"She wouldn't listen," he told her bitterly. "She wants to save our lives by surrendering. Instead, she will—"

"Mon Dieu!" Jules roared. "Look!"

The flag of LaTour was slowly descending the flagpole atop the long blockhouse and fluttering up to take its place was the white banner of surrender. Yet even as it reached the pole's peak a last gun crashed from the stockade in a defiant gesture to the D'Aulnay men swarming up the river banks to circle the stockade.

They watched resentfully as Boudreau, at Madame's orders swung the huge gate open. Here and there a hard-eyed coureur-de-bois snarled his hate at the entry of the foe and gripped his musket tighter as he contemplated the splendid targets offered by the Chevalier's men.

AT their head, resplendent in purple coat and white silken breeches, strode the arrogant figure of the Chevalier D'Aulnay. His highly-polished knee-length boots reflected in the sun's rays like a mirror as, hand on sword hilt, he swaggered slowly and insolently through the ranks of the garrison to where Madame LaTour was standing a little apart, her arm about Catharine's shoulders.

He swept off his plumed hat and bowed with courtly grace to the two women.

"The fortunes of war, fair lady." His voice was a nasal twang; his admiration an insult. Catharine lowered her head. Madame put both hands behind her back standing straight and proud. If she felt the shame of the moment she gave no sign as she watched her own men handing over their weapons and being lined against the stockade.

"Your garrison?" D'Aulnay asked. "Where is the rest of it—" he broke off, sudden suspicion darkening his face. "You held me at bay all this time with this—this rabble. Sacre! Two of my ships crippled and a score of my best men killed by a collection of ragamuffins and filthy Indians! Mother of God, I'll have every man here swing for this!" He brushed past her, saw Boudreau and stopped short, his hand darting for his sword hilt.

"You—*cohon!*" he spat the epithet at the Capitaine as the latter cringed before his blazing eyes. "Why did you not open the gate days ago?"

"I was watched too closely, Monsieur, but—" Boudreau stepped closer to whisper something in the Chevalier's ear.

Paul, standing between Little Beaver and Jules, had a suspicion that he was the subject of the whispering. He was not surprised; therefore, when D'Aulnay turned and eyed him curiously, his thin lips drawn back in a cruel grin. He walked slowly down the line of men.

"So, Monsieur Rainsford." He confronted Paul, arms akimbo, his gray eyes mocking. "So, your father, Lord Rainsford, would help LaTour against me, eh? And you would eat my good food and then fight against me, eh? Very well, my English friend, you shall have the great honor of being the first to swing." He swung on Boudreau who was tagging at his heels.

"Keep him separate from the rest—and build your gibbet well, Mon Capitaine, else I hang you, too, from it. Comprendez!"

"Oui, Monsieur." Boudreau's voice and mien were humble enough, but his eyes were a Hell of hate as he stared at D'Aulnay's insolent swagger.

Only the threat of leveled muskets kept LaTour's men from leaping on the traitor as Boudreau strutted about among D'Aulnay's men superintending the building of the gallows.

For hours, Paul Rainsford, bound hand and foot, lay against the stockade. Little Beaver had vanished from his side soon after they were tied and dragged a few yards away from the rest. His absence had apparently not been noted.

The Holy Day that had dawned so clear and peaceful was ending in carnage and treachery and death. Trickery from friend and foe. The same sun which had greeted the garrison with smiling warmth hid its glowing face in shame behind the western hills as the men of LaTour's garrison were led into the middle of the square.

In the dancing glare of a circle of huge

fires, the haggard group of prisoners faced the improvised scaffold, their heads held high, their faces calm with the courage of men who were not afraid to die—even a shameful death on the gibbet, And with a halter around her neck, Madame La-Tour stood slightly apart, her eyes aglisten with tears as she surveyed the gallant men she had sentenced to death through her readiness to believe in the honor of a man like the Chevalier D'Aulnay.

Paul watched her, fascinated, forgetting for the moment that he, himself, was to be the first to die. Catharine! He suddenly missed her from Madame's side. How long had she been gone? Where was she? He twisted frantically against the rawhide that cut into his wrists, straining his eyes against the flickering light in an effort to spot her somewhere in the crowd. An icy fear gripped his head. Boudreau—

In answer to his unspoken question, a dark form slid silently to the grass beside him. Little Beaver was back.

"The white flower is safe," he said in soft Algonquin. "I have taken her to the island at the river's mouth. There is food and a canoe. You will go to her, my white brother."

"You fool!" Paul hissed. "You were free of this place and you came back? Why didn't you take her far away?"

V

THE Indian's strong fingers gripped Paul's shoulder. "My brother—" for the first time, Paul heard the voice of Little Beaver choke with emotion. "—My brother. Great Beaver found you, a papoose, in the burned cabin a long time ago. You became his son, and my brother. We have travelled many trails together, fought side by side, killed our foes. Always have I respected your counsel—for you are very wise. This time you will do as I wish. I have spoken." He settled back against the palisade as Boudreau strutted toward them.

Paul was kicked to his feet. Little Beaver struggled awkwardly up beside him. Boudreau chuckled as he measured Paul's great height with his eye.

"Perfect!" He gestured toward the gibbet with its dangling noose. "This time, nobody will cut you down, not even your dirty Indian—"

Little Beaver spat full into Capitaine Boudreau's sneering face.

"Sacre!" Boudreau cursed as he recoiled involuntarily. He wiped the spit off on his sleeve. Then, without warning, his fist crashed into the Algonquin's mouth. Only the stockade behind him prevented Little Beaver from falling as he went back before that cowardly blow. He straightened slowly, blood oozing from his cut lips. Death smouldered in his dark eyes.

"You'll be the second, Redskin," Boudreau promised as he swaggered back to the gibbet.

In that instant Paul felt swift fingers at the rawhide on his wrists. The knots loosened and as he cautiously worked the numbness from his wrists and arms, the Indian untied his legs. As he flexed his cramped muscles, Paul had to marvel at the magnificent self-control Little Beaver had exhibited as Boudreau's fist knocked him backward.

Together they stood and watched the Capitaine who was standing on the gibbet adjusting the noose about his own neck while he proudly explained to the interested Chevalier the purpose of another rope which ran from pole to pole and finally disappeared underneath the trap door.

Desperately, Paul sought for an opening to escape. D'Aulnay's men were everywhere. The stockade gate was open, but there were too many men lounging about waiting for the show to start. He eyed the breeches in the palisade. No use, they were all on the wrong side. He wanted to escape into the woods if he could. On the beach, he would be quickly caught.

An Algonquin warwhoop shrilled in Paul's ear. Through the garish light of the fires the body of Little Beaver was like a bronzed projectile as he shot forward cleaving a path through the startled spectators. Behind him, Paul went into sudden action swinging his fists with telling effect on surprised woodsmen. He fought toward that open gate and the dark woods looming beyond.

"Seize them!" Boudreau yelled as he fought to free his neck from the noose.

Scarcely breaking his stride, the Algonquin snatched a tomahawk from a trapper's belt and hurled it. A glittering arc of death, it flew as straight as an arrow

toward the struggling Boudreau.

Thud!

The keen-edged blade struck the trip rope just where it crossed an upright. It parted with a loud snap and the trap door dropped under the weight of the Capitaine. His hoarse yell was cut short as the noose he had so cunningly fashioned brought his falling body up with a jerk. The overhead cross bars creaked protestingly as his body thrashed wildly and his flailing feet sought a foothold.

And that was the last Paul saw as he hit the men at the gate like a battering ram. Little Beaver's slight hesitation to throw the hatchet had permitted Paul to reach him. They were side by side as they struck the barrier of men, broke through. By common consent they swung left and raced for the river.

In a long dive, Paul hit the water. He swam long and deep before he cautiously lifted his face above the surface. He listened for a sound that would tell him Little Beaver was nearby; but only the soft sucking of the river was all around him.

Then, from the crowd milling about the Fort gate, a shrill yell rose. A warrior began his death chant: proud, boastful, defiant yet withal containing something at once pathetic and majestic. For the death of a great warrior ever moves the gods to sorrow.

Sick at heart, Paul swam toward the island. No more would Little Beaver take the trail with him, share his food, stand shoulder to shoulder in battle. He had gone to the happy hunting ground, and a great Chief would darken his lodge and cover his face that the squaws might not see his sorrow.

Deliberately Little Beaver planned it: smuggling Catharine out of the fort, then returning to rescue Paul. Now, he had given up his life for his white brother.

Reaching the island, Paul dragged himself wearily from the water. From a vantage point he looked across at the Fort outlined in the glare of the flames. The sinister framework of the gibbet reared its dreadful head, dominating, its rapacious appetite still unsated as man after man stepped on the trap door and plunged to his death. And a gallant lady stood by with a halter around her neck watching her brave men die one by one . . .

It was Catharine's footsteps in the sand that finally aroused Paul as he lay in a half stupor near the water's edge. In the warmth and comfort of her arms, he strove to forget the horror of it all.

"I thought you would never come, Paul." Her tender fingers brushed his damp hair from his forehead. "But where is Little Beaver?"

"Dead." Paul said bitterly. "They're all dead. D'Aulnay hanged every man and forced Madame to watch with a rope around her neck."

With a deep sob, she clutched him tightly. He comforted her with an assurance that Madame would be safe. "Even D'Aulnay would never dare harm her. But, come," Paul lifted her to her feet. "We must be out of here before daybreak. Where is the canoe?"

Silently, she led the way to a canoe drawn up in the rushes. Luckily the tide was at flood and Paul was able to negotiate the gorge passage in safety. Daybreak found them miles up river hidden in a cave. They made breakfast on the food thoughtfully provided by Little Beaver, then Catharine laid down to sleep while Paul watched the groups of D'Aulnay's Indians searching the river shore for them.

A tender smile creased his face as he glanced down at the sleeping girl. Sleep enhanced her rich beauty, smoothed the lines caused by fear and sorrow. He brushed a hand lightly over her flowing hair and she stirred in her sleep, smiled and put out her hand. He caught it in his own tightly. Behind them lay treachery and death and desolation. The Indian he had loved as a brother was dead, and the heart of Paul Rainsford was sad as he thought of that noble, great-hearted Redskin and the sacrifice he had offered on the altar of friendship. But the past was past; the future lay ahead with its golden promise. Another companion, a brown-eyed girl, would take her place beside him for a long journey that was to come. And far away in England their happiness would soften the memory of the past.

WOLVES CAN BE TOUGH

By V. TENCH

More than one traveler of the snowy wastes has faced the clamorous hunting cry of the timber wolf. Some have lost . . . others returned to tell tales of terror.

THE HORSES began pricking and twitching their ears, turning their heads apprehensively from side to side and pulling on their bits so heavily that it was all the driver could do to hold them to a brisk trot. And then there reached the ears of the two men and two women in the open sleigh—the clamorous hunting cry of timber wolves.

Again it came, now close at hand, as a howling mob of powerful grey shapes plunged from the Northern Alberta timber on to the trail a bare half-mile behind the sleigh. In a flash the horses leaped into a fear-maddened runaway and there commenced a desperate race. But hampered by the heavy vehicle the horses could not hope to out-distance their pursuers—animals that can run down anything except the fleetest members of the deer tribe.

Rapidly the wolves reduced the distance between themselves and their quarry—and there was not a weapon of any kind in the

sleigh excepting the driver's rawhide whip. He did not need to use it on the horses for they were already galloping like crazed things. But, as the leading wolves raced alongside and tried to leap into the sleigh, occasionally lunging savagely at the terrified team, the driver slashed right and left with his whip, ripping chunks out of furry hides.

And then, in a flurry of snow, the racing sleigh swung around a turn in the road and through a tamarack swamp toward a railroad crossing. The trail here was so narrow that the wolves either had to drop behind or dodge trees if they raced alongside. But their respite would not endure. Once the sleigh was out in the open again the wolves would have the advantage.

And then destiny intervened. As the sweating horses yanked the bumping sleigh along the narrow, stump-strewn trail, there wailed through the night the long-drawn-out moan of a locomotive. Just as the lathered horses tore free of the swamp and up the slight rise leading to the railroad grade, there, barely one hundred yards away, the four people beheld a thundering freight train.

Wolves behind and a train dead ahead. The driver of the sleigh had to think fast.

If he pulled his team sharply to one side, it meant capsizing the vehicle, whereupon the wolves would rush in. If he kept on it looked like a certain collision. The driver decided to risk being struck by the train.

The horses were now beginning to flag and for the first time the driver whipped them. They responded with their last ounce, the sleigh bouncing high in the air as the runners screeched over the steel tracks. The cowcatcher of the engine almost scraped the tailboard of the sleigh as the train roared on.

But its timely advent undoubtedly saved the lives of four people and two horses. The uproar of bell, whistle, and grinding wheels caused the wolves to slink back to the shelter of the tamarack swamp.

THAT same winter only cool-headed resourcefulness saved another man from falling victim to the grey terrors. This happening took place in the Far North, almost a thousand miles away from where the foregoing incident occurred, but wolves range freely in all parts of the Northwest, and Canada is a land of tremendous distances.

Before narrating the affair it should be explained that when the snow is deep wolves can easily overtake their natural prey—moose and other members of the deer tribe—as the heavier deer break through the snow crust and flounder helplessly when they try to run, whereas the lighter wolves can traverse the frozen snow surface easily. When the snow is deep the wolves fare well and avoid the abodes of men. When the snow is light the fleet-footed deer can outpace their foes, and, in consequence, the wolves become ravenous and dangerous.

That winter, right until the end of January, the snowfall was exceptionally light, and large packs of ravenous timber wolves wailed their blood-hunger right up to the very walls of isolated cabins. To let a sled dog out of the compound alone meant its instant destruction, and men compelled to travel had to maintain constant vigilance.

Across Great Bear Lake a solitary dog-runner was making his way over the snow-covered ice. Noting that his dogs were whining and fretting, he glanced behind him. Across the stretch of frozen water he spied a rapidly-moving splotch, and a moment later there was borne to his ears the hunting cry of the wolf pack.

Tearing off his heavy parka, he flung it on to the cariole and, although it is hard to make sled dogs run away from a fight, he whipped the protesting team into a full run. He was then about a mile from shore and timber.

This distance he covered at racing speed and reached the timber minutes ahead of the wolves.

At the first fair-sized tree he halted. Hastily tethering his dogs, he swung around, rifle ready.

In a howling mob, twenty or more strong, they plunged straight towards him. The dog-runner commenced to shoot. Seven wolves dropped or crawled away whimpering before the rifle hammer clicked on an empty breech, but the lesson was sufficient. With portions of their dead and wounded in their jaws, the remainder reluctantly slunk out of range.

Cool-headed resourcefulness had averted tragedy. Had this man stopped to confront

the wolves on the ice of the open lake the ending might have been very different. His dogs would have flung themselves into the fight and been killed. He himself, attacked from all sides at once, would probably have met a like fate.

In another case, a saddle horse attacked by wolves was not so fortunate.

Martin Allan, a homesteader in the Lac La Biche district of Northern Alberta, earned ready cash during the winter months by cutting railroad ties. His tie camp was situated in dense timber about twenty miles from his homestead. It was his habit, at the weekend, to ride a small Indian pony to his homestead, returning to his tie camp early on the Monday.

Although the road was a lonely one he never carried a weapon or considered the journey risky—until the night of this happening.

Allan was about four miles from his camp, on the way to his cabin, when his pony became jumpy. Allan thought nothing of the fact, because in unsettled territory horses often become uneasy if they scent a wild animal. But the pony persisted. Knowing the tendency of its kind to buck and bolt if scared, Allan stopped and slipped to the ground to make sure that the saddle cinch was secure. That precaution undoubtedly saved his life.

As, with cold fingers, he fumbled with the cinch buckle, alternately soothing and swearing at the cayuse, the pony suddenly gave a shrill whinny, tore free and raced away at full gallop.

Allan cursed. Then some sixth sense caused him to turn and look up. On the summit of a knoll a bare hundred yards away was a pack of wolves. Gaunt and ravenous, they had been trailing him *silently* as, on occasion, wolves will. Even as the startled Allan stared they leaped down the sides of the knoll and, still silent, plunged purposefully straight towards him.

The sight galvanized Allan into action. He leaped for the branches of a big tamarack. Barely in time he swung himself clear as the leading wolf, springing high in the air, snapped at his legs.

A moment later the pack turned and took off after the fleeing cayuse.

A few minutes later Allan heard a sound that made him shiver—the deep-throated cry wolves give at the kill. That devils' chorus told Allan that the wolves had overtaken and brought down his pony. Knowing that for a time they would now be fully occupied, he made his way back to his tie camp. Next morning he led a few well-armed neighbors back along the trail. They found the remains of the pony. Even the saddle had been ripped to shreds.

A STRAIGHT hand-to-fang duel with a huge timber wolf was the experience of Joseph Boyde, a northern trapper.

At the time timber wolves were exceptionally numerous in Boyde's territory, but although they often robbed his traps, Boyde did not mind a great deal because to even things up he got the occasional wolf, which meant not only a good price for the hide but also collecting the government bounty of ten dollars apiece. And it was actually eagerness on the part of Boyde to get another timber wolf that led up to this happening.

Perhaps it had better first be explained that when the cold is exceptionally intense it is the habit of trappers to remove the catch from their traps as they traverse their traplines, place them in their packsacks, and skin them later in the warmth of the home cabin or one of their line cabins. After skinning the day's catch they throw the carcases outside. This offal, naturally, attracts the furred and feathered scavengers of the white wastes—the blue jays and carrion crows, the pack rats, lynx, coyotes, and occasionally but rarely, timber wolves.

On this occasion Boyde was alone in his home cabin, his partner having gone to the nearest settlement for supplies.

After his evening meal Boyde skinned the animals he had caught that day, threw the carcases outside, and then turned in.

In the middle of the night Boyde was aroused by a savage snarling and growling outside. Thinking that some coyote or lynx was eating the carcasses he had thrown out, he slid quietly from his bunk, picked up his rifle and crept to the one window at the front of his shack. Peering out, he could just discern several dark shapes. Their size told him they were timber wolves.

It was a moonless night, the only light the faint sheen from the snow-covered ground. The window would not open, so,

very quietly, Boyde tip-toed to the door and cautiously started to open it, hoping to get one or two of the wolves before the roar of the shots sent the others racing for the shelter of the bush.

Inch-by-inch, holding his rifle with his left hand, and with his right on the door latch, he eased the door open. But, careful though he was, sensitive ears had caught the slight sound of his movements. As he looked out he saw six timber wolves standing like statues, staring towards him. The nearest brute was not more than five paces away, but never having been attacked by wolves, that fact did not trouble Boyde. Believing that they would run if he stepped outside, he started to raise his rifle to his shoulder while still partly concealed by the dark interior of the cabin.

So sudden and swift was that savage leap that Boyde had no time to shoot; he merely had a confused impression of a huge head studded with gleaming fangs flashing at his throat. Instinctively he thrust out both hands, holding the rifle horizontally to ward the brute off. The fangs closed on the stock of the gun, the wood splintered beneath the scrunch of powerful jaws; then the weapon was wrested from Boyde's grip and he was sent reeling.

As he stumbled backwards before the onrush of the hurtling body, Boyde kicked out wildly. His foot caught the door, slamming it shut before the other wolves could follow their leader.

The wolf's leap, entangled with the rifle, had sent it tumbling to the far end of the shack. Boyde immediately made for the door, but stopped with his hand on the latch. Outside were more wolves.

He turned to face the brute, wondering what chance he stood, for the rifle was now useless and his only other weapon was his skinning knife, hanging on the wall at the far end of the building, above the wolf. He could not reach the knife until the animal moved.

But the wolf was already moving. Belly to ground, green eyes baleful, it was inching slowly towards him.

And then it sprang.

Desperately Boyde thrust out his hands; at the same time he lashed out with his right foot. His kick came a split second too late, but his fingers grasped a furry throat and tightened. The wolf's jaws came together with a savage snap bare inches from Boyde's windpipe even as he was sent crashing to the floor.

Now the wolf was fighting furiously to free itself from that choking grip. Twisting. Snarling. Snapping. The sweat streaming from him, Boyde fought desperately to hold the wildly struggling animal, at the same time trying to bring his feet up and under its body.

It was a nightmare battle, and could obviously not last long. Again and again the wolf's fangs and claws raked Boyde's chest and shoulders. Blood splattered both man and animal.

At last Boyde got his feet up and with a terrific heave sent the heavy brute hurtling to the far end of the cabin. And on the instant Boyde was on his feet, reaching for his skinning knife and a heavy blanket, hurriedly wrapping the blanket about his left arm and hand.

Again the wolf sprang, but this time Boyde was ready. As the animal reached him he thrust his blanket-protected arm full into its open jaws. Once more he toppled over backwards beneath the wolf's weight, but as he did so he repeatedly plunged the skinning knife into its body. Blood spurted as the brute writhed and twisted. Champing jaws ripped the heavy blanket to shreds. Then the wolf stiffened and lay still.

Breathing heavily, Boyde got to his feet and lit a lamp. Brief examination showed him that, apart from superficial wounds, he was practically unhurt.

But never again will Boyde regard timber wolves as skulking, cowardly brutes who run at the sight of man or the sound of a shot. Nine times out of ten they will; but there is always a tenth time and, on such occasions, wolves can be tough.

WINDY BILL

By JOHN BEAMES

Red-headed Bill Scram was the worst windbag in Canada. Trouble was he could fight as well as he could talk . . . ask Gastern, Delford and Penham.

"MYGOSH, ain't you got no sense at all? Now, you'd ought to know that ain't the way to balance up a load," said Windy Bill Scram in his harsh and penetrating voice to the laden and sweating Gastern.

Gastern loosened the tump line and let his pack fall to the ground. His face expressed exasperation almost to madness, and he was so angry his voice choked.

"For the love of Mike, can you never keep your yap quiet?" he demanded. "It's enough to drive a man nuts just to listen to you. I don't believe as you've gone one hour since we started out—one hour, hell, one minute—but what you was blain' and beefin' and bellyachin' about one thing or another. I tell you, we had about all we can stand of it. Ain't that so, boys?"

Whitey Delford and Hi Penham were non-committal. They found Windy a trial, but they were not yet prepared to fight with him about it.

Bill put both hands on his hips and thrust forward a face that was a flaming mass of red hair. His bright blue eyes started out of his head with indignation. "Back them words," he vociferated. "You back them words."

Gastern was a big man and quite a good

fighter among men of ordinary prowess, but the unfortunate part of Windy Bill was that he could fight as well as he could talk.

"Aw, hell," said Gastern with a weary shrug, turning to lift his pack into the canoe. "You talk a feller to death and if he don't like it you want to beat the head off him."

"But what's the harm in a little talkin'?" inquired Bill in a milder tone. "When I got something to say, why I just naturally says it."

"The trouble is," remarked lean little Hi Penham in a low voice, "he most generally ain't got a dern thing to say, but he just naturally says it."

Whitey grinned, but Bill had not heard the comment and he continued to explain in his rasping voice that he was at all times under the necessity of expressing his opinions upon men and things.

Before disposing of that subject and passing on to the next, he said plaintively, "I don't know what you fellers got to holler about. It ain't as if I was mean or ever done a man dirt or laid down on my share of the work. But what I do like is a little friendly conversation."

They climbed into the canoe and paddled down the Dog River, and for five hours Bill maintained the friendly conversation with only an occasional monosyllable from his three companions. He talked and paddled, he talked and waded, he talked and portaged, he talked and chopped wood when they made camp, he talked and ate his supper, he talked until he rolled himself in his blanket. Then and then only was he silent.

"Say, Hi, you awake?" came Gastern's whisper.

"Uh-huh."

"You, Whitey?"

"Yeah."

Gastern raised himself on his elbow and cast a malevolent glance at the now loudly snoring Bill.

"Damn him, he can't keep quiet night nor day. I thought when he'd get to sleep he'd let up, but he rolls over and commences to snore. Say, lads, we got to do something about this. The way it is with this here windjammin' bum, we can't call our souls our own. Now, you back me up and we'll put him where he belongs. If he gets the daylights knocked out of him about three times, maybe it'll learn him to keep his big mouth shut once in awhile."

"It'd be jake if we could," returned Hi in a cautious whisper, "but I ain't in no rush to tangle with Windy no time. He's hell and pizen. Still and all, I'm agreeable to help if I know the rest ain't goin' to back out on me."

"You in on this, Whitey?" queried Gastern.

THE tow-headed youth stirred his big limbs uneasily. "Well, I d'no," he demurred. "Bill is the worst windbag in Canada, but he ain't so bad otherwise. He's awful tiresome to listen to, but he'll pack more stuff, and do more work than any two ordinary men."

"I know all that, I know all that," snapped Gastern. "He's a horse to work, but he's a jackass too haha. If he'd ever let up; if he wouldn't everlastin'ly, continually, never quit workin' that damn jaw of his. His voice goes clear through me like a buzzsaw. I'd give a hundred dollars sometimes to hit him in the mouth with a sawlog. What I want to know, are you goin' to back me?"

"Well, I d'no," deprecated Whitey, "I ain't really got nothin' agen him."

"You poor yaller pup," sneered Gastern, and gave up.

Windy Bill executed some difficult and artistic chokes and changed to a whistling snore of great penetration and volume.

His voice woke them. "Come on now, roll out there, roll out. Show a leg, daylight in the swamp. We'll never get no place if we lay around sleepin' all day."

Gastern sat up with a wild glare in his eye. "Damn you, Windy, it ain't time to get up yet."

"Sure it is, it's half after four. Kind of a dull mornin', that's all. Likely rain a little today. We better get goin' so we can make Dog Lake by dark. Come on now, Whitey, let's see you smile. Hey, Hi, time you was cookin' breakfast."

He was scattering chips busily all the time he spoke, his heavy axe sinking to the eye in a log at every stroke. He always woked as if life and death depended upon his exertions.

The three rose and huddled over the

fire. It was late August and already the northern mornings were chilly. Bill piled on the fuel, admonishing Hi all the time to hurry up with breakfast as they had a long day ahead of them.

When the meal was ready, he wolfed his portion in three gulps and bawled, "Come on now, can't set and eat all day. Got a long way to go. By gosh, you fellers'd ought to live in a city with a lot of soft-handed dudes, set and drink tea out of chiney cups with a bunch of Janes. I seen 'em do it. A real tough guy chews the hindleg off a moose on the run, takes a suck at a lake, and up and away. Here am I waitin' for you, canoe all loaded, everythin' ready, and there you set and eat."

"Can't you give a man even two minutes to eat in?" bellowed Gastern. "Where's your rush? Begad, I ain't a wolf. Shut up. I'll come when I get damn good and ready, see?"

Hi and Whitey also glared rebelliously at Windy.

"You fellers make me tired," he lamented, pacing up and down feverishly. "Hhere's half the day gone already and us not even started. It'll be freeze-up before we get into the new country, and we'll likely find the ground staked clear to Hudson Bay."

"I thought you told us you was the only man knew that country?" said Gastern.

"So I am, but that don't prevent anyone else from goin' in there, does it? Besides, when I'm goin' any place I like to move."

"Seemin'ly," said Gastern. "All right we're acomin'."

ALL that day they descended the rocky and turbulent Dog River, and Windy talked unceasingly on every subject that passed through his restless mind or caught his restless eye, all but oblivious of comment, agreement or objection.

At nightfall they reached the lake, a lonely and forsaken body of water, lying among low hills of broken rock, forested with spruce and jackpine.

Gastern, Hi and Whitey were all very weary, for the water was low, and the heavily laden canoe had taken a lot of handling. But though Bill had portaged the heaviest loads and laboured the most conscientiously at his paddle, he was first out of the canoe, first to seize an axe and to light a fire. Then he unloaded the canoe almost single-handed, lifted if from the water and turned it upside down on the beach. Through it all he continued to talk with his early morning freshness and fervour.

He wolfed the food prepared by Hi, smoked one pipe in ten minutes of furious puffing, lay down and fell asleep in an instant, after his invariable custom.

Morning broke stormy. Dog Lake was narrow and crooked, but the pointed green waves bore crests of foam and the wind, hurrying down from Arctic wastes, had a bite of its own, accentuated by frequent sharp flurries of sleet.

"Ain't goin' to pull out this mornin', are you?" asked Gastern.

"Sure, sure, this ain't nothin', nothin' at all," returned Bill carelessly. "Come on now, let's load up and get goin'. Why, I remember once up on Beaver Lake." And he was forthwith embarked on an anecdote that had neither beginning, middle, nor end.

They crept down the shore of the lake for several miles, keeping in the narrow strip of water unvexed by the north-east wind, until they came to a jutting headland. Beyond that the lake sent an arm off eastward, and down this galloped the white horses.

"We'll cut across here," said Bill casually. "Then it's all easy water."

"You ain't crossin' here, surely to gosh?" Gastern waved his hand at the leaping combers. "Why, them waves'd sink a ship."

"Say, tell you what," offered Bill, "I'll fight you whether we tackle it or not: fists, guns, axes, teeth and toenails, no holts barred."

"You're a damn fool," growled Gastern.

"Sure," said Bill cheerfully, always was. Come on now, paddle like the devil and see can we get across before the next gust hits us."

They did paddle hard. Bill paddled hardest, but continued to talk though nobody had time to listen to him. The laden canoe floated like a log yith the waves lipping at the gunwhale.

"Here's another gust acomin'," he roared suddenly. "Paddle, you jail-cheatin' swill-eaters. Paddle like hell."

They panted, the sweat trickled down their faces. The reedy shore was close at hand, but to eastward the water had turned from green to indigo and stinging sleet beat upon their right cheeks.

Hi, in his anxiety, plunged his paddle too deep and nearly went overboard with it. The reeds were only twenty yards away, but the second's delay was fatal. It seemed as if the whole lake rose up and cascaded into the canoe. She filled and sank instantly in five feet of water.

Bill bobbed up. "Get her in the reeds," he shouted in a strangled voice. "Get aholt . . ." A wave washed over his head. He spat out water. "All safe, Gas, Hi, Whitey? OK, hawk on her." Another wave choked his utterance. "Here we go. We're all right. Hit her . . ."

Coughing out words and water, kicking out vigorously at the stern of the canoe, he shepherded the whole outfit through the reeds to the shore, where they beached the canoe Nobody had been hurt though all were chilled to the bone and shivering.

It does not take very much water to ruin a bag of flour, and what of their stock had not dissolved was a slimy and useless pulp. They were reduced to their emergency ration of salt pork.

"This means," said Gastern with something like relief, "that we just got to turn around and go back. We can't live just on sowbelly. Serves you damn right for tryin' to cross in that wind. I told you not."

"Go back nothin'," trumpeted Bill. "What in hell for? Ain't the country full of game? Why, one time I didn't eat a thing but moosemeat for three months. All we need to do is find a moose, or a deer, or a bear, anythin' at all with meat on it. Why I knew a guy got bushed and lived on frogs. How'd you like that? Well, here now we got plenty sowbelly. I don't know what you're kickin' about."

"Aw quit talkin' crazy," snarled Gastern. "No, we've had enough. We're goin' back and glad to go."

This time the other two were in complete agreement with him. The prospect of subsisting for weeks on salt pork and such game as they might be able to secure was too much for even the easy going Whitey.

WINDY Bill's fierce eyes began to bulge again. He screamed like an enraged peacock and reached for his rifle. "You are goin' on. We come this far and we ain't goin' back. I'll bust the damn canoe right here and turn you all loose to starve."

They had not yet learned to act in concert against him, and gave in sullenly, permitting him to drive them northward still for what remained of that day.

By nightfall, however, their minds were made up. They waited until Bill was asleep and then all three rose as one.

"This is as far as we go," said Gastern.

They nodded assent.

"This time," said Gastern to Whitey, "you back me up. No crawfishin'. We may have to handle Windy and it'll take all three to do it."

"I'll be with you," promised Whitey.

"All right, then this is what we do." Their heads drew together and they laid their plans in whispers.

Long before dawn, Bill bounded to his feet with a raucous yell. The others rose sullenly, not speaking or looking at him, and ate a breakfast composed of a sort of gruel made from their spoiled flour, salt pork, and tea without milk.

"Come on, let's get goin'," bawled Bill, beginning to load the canoe.

Gastern shook his head, "we ain't goin' that way."

There was a finality about his tone that made even Bill pause. He looked at their three set and hostile faces, and began to tug at the crimson whiskers on each side of his square face, working his jaw from side to side. "What you mean, you ain't goin'? I'll make you."

"You can't make us."

Bill snatched up his rifle.

"Nor you can't bluff us. Put that gun down, you ain't goin' to shoot anybody."

Bill dropped the weapon rather sheepishly. "But I can lick any one of you," he said.

"Even if you could lick all three of us, which you can't, we ain't goin' that way."

Bill suddenly changed his tone. "Now lookahere, boys, be reasonable. Look all the way we come. All our grubstake used up. We ain't a hundred mile from where we're goin'. If we got down to it we could make it in three days easy. We could make it in two. Hell, if we really got down to it, we could be there tonight."

"You know damn well it'll take all of four days," returned Gastern coldly.

"Well, what's four days? We'll see game sure. Or we can catch fish. No need to go hungry."

"If we have to take time huntin' and fishin', we won't get there in a week," insisted Gastern.

"Well, what of it? Long's we get there, huh? We don't need to do no development work if you don't want. We'll just stake our claims, eh? All I'm askin' you is to be reasonable."

"We ain't goin'," was the inexorable reply.

Bill put one hand on his hip and patted his chest with the other. "You mean you ain't goin' with me?"

"No!"

"You don't like me, huh?"

"No, we don't like you."

Bill looked troubled and unhappy. "I don't know why you wouldn't like me, I like all you boys. Me and you jangle some, Gas, but apart from you will talk so much, I ain't got a thing against you."

"Me talk too much," snorted Gastern.

BILL put up both hands. "Here now, here now, leave me get a word in edgeways. Just let me talk a little for this one time. You never give a feller a chance to say a word. What I says is, just quit your beefin' and come along with us."

"We ain't goin' along with you, and that means all of us," bellowed Gastern.

"That so?" inquired Bill anxiusly, looking from Hi to Whitey.

They nodded.

"What you got agen me, Hi?"

"Well, nothin' personal, I mean . . ." floundered Hi. "No grub, and . . . Well, what I mean, Bill, you talk too damn much."

"Is that so?" Bill's tone was caustic. He turned hopefully to Whitey. "But you're my friend, ain't you, Whitey? You like me pretty well, don't you?"

"I like you," answered Whitey. "But you get me down—if you didn't talk so much . . ."

"Three quitters, that's what you are," said Bill scornfully. "Got to have your bellies full all the time or you lay down. Ain't got the guts to take a chance. Well, go on back home, I don't want no more to do with you. Go on home. Me. I'm goin' on. I ain't no quitter."

"But ain't you comin' back with us?" asked Whitey. "We don't want to leave you this way."

"I ain't goin' back, nor the three of you can't make me," vociferated Bill. "Give me a hunk of sowbelly and let me get to hell out of here. I don't want to travel with no stinkin' yaller-bellies."

He proceeded to drag his own pack from the canoe. Then with an axe he cut off a large piece of salt pork, and filled a small bag with tea.

"That's all I need, you can keep the rest. I'm tough, I can go to hell and back on a little chunk of sowbelly and what I can shoot. What the hell does a guy need of flour?"

"You ain't comin' along?" asked Gastern.

"Not with punks like you, I wouldn't go no place."

The three reluctantly climbed into the canoe and pushed off.

Whitey turned for a last plea. "Come on, Bill, forget about it and hop aboard. We're sorry if we said anythin' to hurt your feelin's."

But Bill was aggrieved and indignant. He waved them loftily away. "G'wan about your business."

He turned and charged off into the bush at a half-run, and his sense of injury kept him moving at a terrific pace for a considerable time.

As he tramped along, he gesticulated with his free hand, his rifle in the other, and gave vent to his feelings aloud.

"I'm best shut of 'em, they wasn't no good to me anyway. Slower'n mud turtles, just hold a feller back. Leave me do all the work—wouldn't listen to a thing I said. All the time tryin' to hush me down and shut me up. And them tellin' me I talk too much, the nerve of 'em. Feller can't set like a bump on a log

and never say nothin'. Gabby bunch, tha's what they are—want to do all the talkin' themselves."

Prospectors are forced by circumstance to spend a good deal of time alone, but nothing irked Bill more. Though he went on talking, it was not the same thing with no one to listen to him. The farther he went the more intense became his bitterness against his late partners.

"The poor, mis'ble, cheap and dirty, lowlife and lousy, cold-footed quitters. Walk off and leave a man alone like that. Begad, I'd sooner eat dirt off a mud floor than renege on a pard like that."

He encountered a rabbit, sitting bolt upright, its twitching nose its only sign of life, and addressed it with eagerness. "Hello, Mr. Rabbit, how are you this fine mornin'? Pretty hard life you got, ain't it? Every dern thing from a weasel to a man, you're their meat. I wouldn't be a rabbit, no for nothin' you could give me. But I ain't goin' to hurt you."

The rabbit put its head down and lobbed away.

"Well, good day, and good luck to you," called Bill after it.

THEN he felt thirsty and plunged down to the lake through the alders. While he knelt to drink, a grey Canada jay fluttered down and perched ten feet away, watching him with its head on one side and an impudent and inquisitive look in its shining black eye.

"Hello, Mr. Whiskeyjack, and how are you feelin' today? Not too bad, eh? Well, I got nothin' for you right now, but you follow along for company, eh, and I'll give you a snack soon's I camp. How about it?"

The whiskeyjack flew off with a strident cry. That made Bill angry again. "You don't want to listen to me talk neither, eh? Neither you nor the rabbit, nor them poor swipes of partners of mine. 'Pears nobody don't want to talk to me."

He brooded on that for a time, and then burst out, "Why in hell don't nobody never want to listen to me. I got no friends at all seemin'ly."

He came to a patch of blueberries. He did not halt to pick, but stooped and scooped clusters from the low bushes between his fingers as he went, and ate them, leaves, sticks and all, just like a hungry bear.

The going was bad, a good deal of it over jagged rock ledges and much of the rest through spongy muskegs, but he had covered some forty miles before hunger, darkness and weariness at last combined to make him halt.

The sound of his own voice had begun to jar on him, and he was comparatively silent, feeling lonely and forsaken.

He made a fire, put his billy on to boil. As he toasted strips of salt pork on a pointed stick and wolfed them half-raw, he muttered to himself about the ingratitude of man. The billy boiled and he tossed in a pinch of tea and put it aside to cool. Then he smoked a pipe, gulped down the tea, tealeaves and all, and lay down.

Just before he fell asleep he said in a loud voice. "I'll stake me a good claim, and cash in on it. Then them birds will be sorry. They'll look pretty cheap. Tell me I talk too much."

He jumped to his feet with his usual roar at first peep of dawn, stared around, and realized that he was alone. "They walked out on me," he said bitterly. "Well, I'm goin' to show 'em."

During the day loneliness ate into his soul, and fatigue slowed his pace. Even he could not keep up a four-mile an hour gait over such country. There was hardly any earth now, nothing but naked rock splashed with thin patches of grey-green moss. The stunted trees could only find precarious footing in crevices. The muskegs though were a tangle of spruce and cotton willows, growing in knee-deep slime on top of eternal ice.

He had rationed himself, and the few strips of salt pork he allowed himself for breakfast soon left a void in his stomach. There were blueberries here and there, but he merely snatched at them as he went by. He was determined to reach his prospect in three days as he had told Gastern he could.

He was almost sick with lonelineess, fatigue and hunger when he made his camp that night, but none the less resolute to push on. His feet dragged a little over the ice-worn rock next day, and the muskegs he had to cross seemed deeper and stickier than ever. Yet before nightfall he had reached the gnarled mass

of whitish rock that he had noted as promising on a previous trip. He had not had time to examine it very carefully then, for winter was treading hard on his heels, and he was short of food.

Now he saw that it was good, better than he had imagined. There was undoubtedly gold in it, though how much he could not even guess. He patted it. "This is what's goin' to show them poor punks they was foolish not to come with me," he said.

Recklessly he filled himself with salt pork—he would try and keep alive by hunting on the return trip—drank his tea, smoked his pipe and lay down. He woke refreshed and comparatively cheerful. As he cooked the last of his salt pork, he began to talk again to himself.

"Guess I couldn't expect 'em to be as tough as what I am. Maybe I was a little short with 'em, but they didn't ought to told me I talk too much." He added after a pause, "Even if it was true."

He set about staking his discovery, setting up his post and taking bearings. Since he had been forced to leave dynamite and drills in the canoe, he had only his miner's pick. With this he chipped off a load of specimens and filled his pack.

HIS burden was heavy, his feet sore, his pork was all eaten and he had to stop to hunt. He saw no big game, but shot a few ducks. Eaten half raw and eked out with blueberries, they sustained him.

It had taken him three days to reach the prospect, it took him six to return. When he topped the last ridge overlooking Dog Lake, he saw a column of smoke rising into the calm, sunny sky.

He spoke aloud for the first time in days, "I'm in luck," he said. "There's somebody camped down by the lake—somebody to talk to." Then he checked himself. "No," he said explosively and closed his mouth tight.

He was not a prepossessing sight as he stepped out of the bushes on to the lakeshore. His hair and beard were more tangled than ever, and there were blueberry leaves and duck feathers in his whiskers. From the waist down he was caked with the black slime of muskegs and smelt of decaying vegetation. The rock had cut his boots to pieces; the sole of one had come loose, and he had tied it up with a strip of blanket. He limped and his broad back was bowed by the load of rock he carried.

Three men were sitting glumly around the fire, but they leaped to their feet at his appearance. "Where in hell have you been?" shouted Whitey. "We been lookin' all over for you."

Bill opened his mouth to let loose a flood of words, but gulped instead. "I went on and staked," he replied in a restrained voice.

The three gathered around him, hustled him to the fire, pressed fish and tea on him, relieved him of his pack, began to take off his sodden boots, and still he said nothing.

It was they who talked, all eager to excuse themselves. "We didn't think you'd beat it like that," explained Whitey. "We come right back as soon as you headed for the bush, but we didn't know where you'd went. You didn't think we'd leave you, did you?"

"We kep' a big fire goin' night and day," said Hi, "and hunted all over. We wasn't goin' back without you. We been livin' on fish. Here, have some more."

Still Bill did not speak.

"Come on, Bill," said Gastern in a pleading tone. "Say, you ain't mad at us. We never aimed to leave you, you know that."

Windy Bill spoke at last in a curiously quiet voice. "Boys, this is good of you. I'd ought to know you wouldn't leave me, but I was mad. I guess the trouble with me is I do talk too much. I been thinkin' about it, and I remembered what you and different other folks told me. So then I wasn't mad at you no more, and to prove it I staked claims for us all four."

"The hell you did," said Gastern, "Well, now, you old . . ."

"I feel pretty ashamed," said Hi.

Whitey was too overcome to speak.

Bill sat quietly toying with a specimen he had drawn from his pack.

Then Gastern began to laugh. "By gad, I never thought I'd come to it, but this is one time I want to hear you talk. Come on, let's hear all about it."

To whip the Devil-jinx of Loon Lake's prize timber stand, and erase the double-cross stigma inherited from his father . . . these were the high-top goals of a kid who was licked before he started.

Satan's Timber Claim

By SONST HAGEN

JERRY JOHNSON stepped from the old fashioned bath tub, flung a towel around his hips, and strode to the door of his hotel room. "All right, keep your shirt on," he shouted angrily, "I'm coming."

The pounding pulsated through the room louder than ever and the door shook on its

hinges until he thought it would crack.

Jerry turned the key in the lock and pulled the door open. "What're you trying to do, break it down?" Then he saw his line runner, Runt Carlson. "Why don't you use your key?" he demanded.

Runt thrust his stubby fingers into his pocket and came forth with the key. He eyed it stupidly.

"You must be bush crazy," accused Jerry. "I told you I didn't want to be disturbed until I'd washed off the months of dirt from the woods. I told you I wanted to soak in that bath tub for three hours. Now what's so important?"

"I . . . you . . . there's a gink down at the Lone Pine Saloon . . . says he wants ta see ya right away . . . he's been shot . . . looks bad."

"When timber cruisers are so in demand that wounded men start shouting for them it's about time I changed my job." Jerry

started back toward the bath tub.

"He . . . he keeps calling for Double John."

"Double John!" Jerry whirled, dropping the towel, and grabbed Runt by the shirt. The muscles bulged along his arm, across his shoulders and down his tanned back. "What else did he say?"

"Nothin' . . . put me down."

In less than five minutes Jerry was dressed and on his way to the Lone Pine Saloon. Timber Landing's night life was in full swing. Each saloon, each gambling hall, each brothel was gaudily lighted. And in every nook and cranny of the far northern lumber town mingled the smells of rotted chips and fresh cut pine.

But Jerry wasn't conscious of these surroundings, not even conscious of Runt who trotted beside him. His mind was filled with thoughts; thoughts he'd had since childhood; thoughts which filled him with a deep longing sorrow, then made him fighting mad. How clearly he could remember the days he'd ran lines for his father, John Johnson, the best timber cruiser in the north. When other little boys proudly boasted of becoming log drivers or logging engineers, Jerry had boasted that he'd be a timber cruiser like his father.

Little men can never long tolerate big men. Like a pack of wolves they will band together and try to tear him from his perch. They framed Double John with a crooked timber deal. Rather than go to prison and be away from the woods he loved so well, rather than admit defeat, Double John had committed suicide.

From that day on Jerry had lived under a shadow—imaginary and actual. Imaginary in the sense that no one would trust him; actual in the sense that drunken jacks often made fun of the name, Double John. Such occasions made Jerry want to fight; to smash out with his huge fists. He felt that way now.

The young timber cruiser shouldered his way through the swinging doors of the Lone Pine Saloon and stopped. He squinted against the blue-gray smoke. The rancid tang of cheap whiskey came to his nostrils. The large room was silent for the painted ladies and their rough, bearded escorts were crowded around a table.

"He's on that table," offered Runt.

Jerry strode forward. Long arms shot out, parted the onlookers, and his shoulders wedged through. Runt followed down the wide path he made.

Then Jerry was before the table. He was looking down into the face of a dead man.

"He died less 'n a minute ago," said the bartender. "Right here in me arms. Mumblin' somethin' about Double John, he was. But I couldn't get the words."

The man's woolen shirt was soggy with blood. A little pool of it was forming on the table and the light turned it into a large, flat ruby. Jerry didn't recognize the man. "Anyone know this man?" he asked.

No one answered. Then a lazy voice said: "Ain't never seed 'em before."

The clothes were typical of those worn by the north woods lumberjack; felt cap, heavy woolen shirt, corduroy pants, high-top boots. No clue there. Jerry's eyes searched the body trying to find something out of order. There was nothing. Then he began fingering through the pockets. Tobacco, a thin roll of bills, jacknife, a large handkerchief, a few assorted buttons—that was all. "What do you make of these," he asked Runt.

"Same as you . . . nothin'."

RUNT also searched the body and Jerry watched his fingers. The timber cruiser knew the Runt could make things disappear with his soft, stubby fingers like magic. Jerry saw no quick movement as Runt completed the search. The Runt shook his head.

"Well, guess we got here too late," Jerry said slowly.

The Runt moved his little finger sideways in a slow easy motion. Jerry caught the action, saw the look in the Runt's eyes, and his breath came faster.

They left the saloon and walked out into the night. "What's up, Runt?" Jerry asked haltingly.

"Found this in the shirt pocket . . . stuck against the inside flap." He handed Jerry a small folded piece of paper. "Didn't want anyone lookin' over yer shoulder when ya read it."

Jerry stopped in front of a lighted window and tore the paper open. The note had been written with a pen wielded by a strong, steady hand.

Dear Double John;
According to my records you surveyed sections 45, 46, 47, 63, 64 *and* 65 *along base line* 44 *for the Newbold Lumber Company twenty-two years ago. You estimated this stand at one hundred million feet of timber. The present survey shows its evaluation at only thirty-five million. Could you come to Loon Lake and help us find the mistake?*

Chris Newbold

Jerry handed the note to Runt and he read it slowly, carefully. "What do you make of it?" asked Jerry.

"Ain't never heard of a guy by that name."

"Me either. Where's this Loon Lake?"

"If I ain't mistook it's about two hundred miles up in the Smokey River country."

"You feel like traveling?"

"Not up there I don't . . . not on a note like this. Man alivin', Jerry, it might be a trick ta get ya just like they got yer pa."

"And kill one of their own men to do it?"

"Don't seem likely at that," admitted Runt. "But the guy couldda bin kept in the dark and shot as he come inta town."

"I'm not so sure."

"Ya know the repyetation that country has just as well as I do. I say we stay here and keep breathin'. Besides, I'm gettin' too darn old ta run lines all over the north. Don't fergit, I'm not as young and tough as you."

Their heavy boots made hollow sounds as they moved along the board walk. Now and then a stray dog sniffed at their heels.

"There's only one thing wrong with your argument. You take for granted that I'm as good a cruiser as my father. I'm not."

Runt pulled a silver dollar from his pocket and looked at it carefully. "I've cruised myself an' run lines fer many a good man in the woods, but I never did see a guy cruise as quick and smart as you. Take that an' smoke it in yer pipe."

"All right then. If I am that good, which I doubt, shouldn't I do everything possible to keep my father's name as well as my own clean? If there is a mistake up there, isn't it my duty to find out . . . come hell or high water?"

Runt squirmed uneasily. "Don't mind the hell . . . it's the high water I hate."

"Well . . .?"

"I'm going back fer a couple drinks before I turn in."

Jerry chuckled to himself. Every time he cornered Runt in an argument the other shut up like a thirsty clam and went for a drink.

Two hours later, bath finished, Jerry got into bed and settled down to sleep. It took some time to get used to the stiff clean sheets.

Once he awoke, startled. Then he realized he was in a hotel room and rolled over. A dying moon cast a faint square of light on the floor. In this light Jerry saw the outline of a man. "Come to be', Runt, we go' work tomor . . .," he mumbled sleepily.

The next moment the figure dove forward and Jerry saw the glint of steel. He tried to protect himself, tried to roll over but his muscles were sluggish. Once he lifted the bed clothes to stop the thrust of the knife. But only once . . .

"Jerry! Jerry!"

Far away sounded the cry and the young timber cruiser tried to swim through the inky blackness toward the pin-point of light. Closer and closer it came. Then it was right before him and he was gazing into a lighted lamp. He squinted against the glare and was surprised to find himself on the floor beside the bed.

"Are ya hurt?"

Jerry looked at the bloody sheets twisted about him and groaned. "Blood all over the place, and you ask if I'm hurt. Suppose if I fell in a river you'd ask if I got wet."

"Ya can't be hurt bad."

Carefully the young man felt the bump on his head. "I can still navigate. Rip this sheet up and tie those stabs in my arm."

Despite shaking fingers Runt stopped the flow of blood and stepped back to view his work. "Ya look like somethin' that crawled out of a grain alcohol dream."

"If that's a joke I'm in no mood to enjoy it."

"Joke or no joke, somebody tried to kill you."

"Can't you say anything but the obvious?"

"If ya wouldn't use such big words maybe I'd know what ya was talkin' about."

"I said I know darn well somebody tried to kill me."

"Now maybe you'll use that thing that

keeps yer backbone from unravelin' and stay away from Loon Lake."

"Listen, if I'm important enough to kill just to get me out of the way, I'm also important enough to make sure I get there." Jerry crawled back into bed slowly and carefully. "If you haven't gambled all our money away buy two tickets for Loon Lake first thing in the morning."

"But . . . but you can't travel with them holes in ya!"

"I can in two days. Now shut up and get to bed."

II

"SO this is Loon Lake," said the young timber cruiser as he stepped to the wooden platform of the tiny station.

"I tole ya not ta expect much. I distinkly ramember tellin' ya . . . couple stores, couple saloons, an' a couple sawmills."

"You forgot to mention that little hospital over there . . . and that church."

"All right, so I'm a liar. Couldda growed since I bin here, ya know."

The two men checked in at the local hotel and washed the sleep from their eyes. A half hour later they ate breakfast, then stepped out into the street.

"Well, let's get to work."

Runt said nothing as he ran a quarter over the back of his hand. "All right, but I still don't like it," Runt ventured.

Having received directions from the hotel clerk, the two men set out for the mill. On the edge of town they found it and stopped to look the place over.

"Man alivin'!" groaned Runt, "Looks like it's 'bout ready to fold up."

"Does look kind of sick at that," admitted Jerry.

Both walked to the building marked OFFICE. A clerk glanced up and squirted words through the corner of his mouth: "What's on your mind?"

"I'd like to see Chris Newbold."

"No jobs open at present."

"I said I want to see Chris Newbold." Jerry's words snapped.

The clerk sighted along his stubby pencil toward a door. "Walk right in."

Jerry opened the door, Runt following at his heels. Behind a large desk sat a young woman. Her brow was furrowed in thought. As she looked up the lines disappeared and a smile came to her petite, oval face.

"I'd like to see Mr. Chris Newbold," said Jerry.

"The name happens to be *Miss* Chris Newbold, Miss Christine Newbold, and I'm that person."

Runt's breath exploded through his lips. "Man alivin'!"

Jerry didn't bother to keep the disappointment from showing in his face. There must be some mistake. Hopefully he took the note from his pocket and handed it to her. "I want to talk to the person who wrote that note."

"I wrote it."

"Not so fast, sister. Write that first line over again."

The young woman took a pen and rewrote the first line on a piece of scratch paper and handed it to Jerry.

He compared the two first lines carefully, then returned both slips to the desk. "Guess you are at that."

"Now would you mind if I did a little cross-examining?"

"Your privilege."

"You're not Double John. If you are you cruised my timber when you were about three years old."

"I'm Jerry Johnson, Double John's son . . . this is Runt, my line runner."

"Let's get outta here," suggested Runt. "Women!" He screwed up his nose as if the word offended him.

Jerry saw fire leap to the girl's blue eyes. "If you don't like me you can get out!"

"Nothin' perzonal, mam," apologized Runt. "It's jus' that women and loggin' don't mix."

"They do at this mill."

"Mix is right," answered Runt vehemently, "and the left overs stick out all over. I never saw such a messy mill. Why . . ."

"Shut up," snapped Jerry. Then his voice lowered. "Excuse him, Miss Newbold, he's rather set in his ways."

"And how do you feel about women, Mr. Johnson?"

Jerry read the challenge in her voice, her eyes. "I don't like it either. But a man died to bring me this message. Another tried to kill me in my hotel room."

"Jess . . . dead!" A look of keen agony came to those eyes and Jerry watched the transformation He wished at once that he hadn't broken the news so abruptly.

"I'm sorry, Miss Newbold. He died before I could get to him. Shot in the back. Runt found your note in his shirt pocket. Was he . . . close to you?"

Despite the tears her words were hard and bitter. "Just the last real friend I had . . . besides Charles." She fought the tears away. "But if you hate women so my problems would only bore you."

"I don't hate women, exactly. And I never let my private feelings interfere with my job. If your troubles were important enough to ask my father's help . . . and a man died to get it . . . they're also important enough for me. Or don't you trust me?"

THE girl's eyes bored into his and he could feel his big toe wiggle from the strange emotion it stirred within him. It was like going to bed in the woods and gazing at the sky before dropping off to sleep. Just as bare was his soul, just as completely at ease. It was the type of scrutiny under which no man objects. It bred confidence, even as it sought confidence.

"You asked for it," she said.

Deep within him Jerry felt that stirring again. It was a something which tickled his spine with a red-hot feather.

"So you think you've gone through something," she said, waving them to chairs. "Five years ago my father died leaving me this mill and all our standing timber up in the woods. From the very start I did my best but we kept losing money just the same. Without Charles . . . he's the general manager . . . we'd be out of business now."

Jerry caught himself watching her golden hair dance as she emphasized her words.

"I had one chance to come out on top —cut the big stand about sixty miles from here. The best timber in these parts. Father told me there was enough timber in that stand to guarantee a run for ten years, at least. Before cutting I naturally sent up a cruiser to survey the job." She paused a moment. "He didn't come back."

Runt dropped a silver dollar he was about to make disappear and scrambled under his chair for it.

"I sent up another. Two weeks later he was found dead, stabbed in the back. A third went up at his own risk. A month later one of my men found his report, written in pencil, tied to a tree. We haven't found the cruiser yet." She brought a tiny white handkerchief to her eyes and touched them quickly as if trying to hide the action. "I should have called the police, I know. But the mill couldn't stand that type of publicity . . . being so close to bankruptcy. Now I'm afraid to call them."

The office was silent. Only the occasional screech of a saw biting into a pine knot seeped in from the outside. Jerry could see that the girl was again close to tears.

"I went through the report and found that the cruiser had valued it at only thirty-five million feet. From the files I found that your father had valued it at one hundred million feet. Your father must have been correct since my father wasn't easy to fool. If the present cruiser's report is correct I'll have to close the mill and declare bankruptcy. Not to mention the obvious fact that someone is trying to scare me away from timber that is rightfully mine."

Tears glistened in her eyes. Jerry saw them and still admired the courage this girl had. "How did you know my father lived at Thunder Landing?"

"Charles said that's where he was the last he'd heard."

"Why did you send for my father?"

"If Mike Newbold trusted him, so would his daughter."

"My father is dead."

"Now it's my turn to say I'm sorry, and I mean it."

"Could I see the report that timber cruiser sent in?"

"Certainly." The girl walked to a side door and called: "Charles, will you please bring the survey sheets . . . better bring the plat book too."

A moment later Charles entered the office. Jerry saw the neatly pressed suit, the well-shined shoes, pausing momentarily at the man's necktie and then his gaze jumped to the face. Jerry judged the man to be over fifty since the skin along his weak jaw sagged slightly. The man's eyes darted around the room, paused on him-

self, then Runt, then fondled Christine. Jerry didn't like the man at that moment.

The girl took the report and handed it to Jerry. Runt looked over his shoulder and they studied it together. No marks were erased. Jerry noted the types of wood, read the amounts of each; studied the section line reports. He put the report down and pulled the plat book open to the section indicated on the report. Carefully he checked base lines and figures. Everything in order. "Looks all right to me," he said finally.

"Of course it is," answered Charles smoothly. He took the report and wrapped it with strips of wood.

Jerry noted this and the girl's gaze followed his.

"This is just the way we received it," she explained. "Wrapped in this wood."

"Women are sentimental, you know," smiled Charles by way of explanation.

Jerry's fists clenched and he fought the urge to paste the man in his mushy face. "Are they?" he challenged.

"Oh, pardon me for not introducing you," said the girl. "Charles, this is Mr. Johnson . . . and this is his line runner. Mr. Johnson is the son of Double John. His father is dead. He came in answer to my note."

For a moment Jerry thought Charles' limp body had stiffened. But he couldn't be sure.

"Glad to meet you, I'm sure," purred Charles. "With your father dying the way he did, I'm sure you wouldn't be interested in this job."

"What are you talking about, Charles?" Christine asked.

"Didn't Mr. Johnson tell you?"

"No . . ."

"His father died . . . let's say, because he didn't want to meet with justice and pay his debt"

Jerry took a step forward, then checked himself. Fists still clenched, he spoke through lips drawn tight by little muscles: "My father was framed!"

Charles' smile was like a hand patting the top of Jerry's head in a benigned manner.

"I . . . I didn't know that," Christine answered slowly.

"Don't worry," came Jerry's quick reply, "I won't go to work for you and spoil your nice little mill. I'm taking the next train back to Thunder Landing." With this he strode to the door and walked out.

"Man alivin'!" groaned Runt. "Can ya imagine a guy wearin' a tie and likin' it!"

"Find out what time the train leaves," commanded Jerry.

"Ya know darn well when it leaves."

"I mean the logging train that leaves this mill in the morning."

"But we're goin' back ta Thunder Landing."

"That's what you think."

AT four-fifteen in the morning the little narrow gauge engine puffed out of the mill yards with its long line of empty logging cars. The cars jerked and squealed as if they disliked following that engine into the darkness. Slowly the train gathered speed and rounded a bend thick with swamp willow.

Two figures leaped from the brush, stumbled along beside the cars, then jumped on. They quickly took off the bulky packs fastened to their backs and lashed them to the narrow crossbeams with chains from the chain box. Next, they took rope from their pockets and lashed themselves to that same beam.

"All set?" yelled Jerry.

"Yeah . . . an' none too soon fer me," bellowed Runt. "If this darn contraption goes any faster I'll be pickin' my bottom teeth outta the top of my head."

"It better go faster."

"You young ox," screamed Runt. " 'Tain't 'nough ya gotta get me outta bed at three 'n the mornin' ya gotta rile my guts up so I can't eat fer a month. I'm gettin' old, I can't stand this stuff . . . basides . . . it's crazy."

"I prefer this to being dead"

"If we ride this thing very long I *will* be dead!"

Jerry couldn't help smiling. If Runt was angry with him now, he'd be a raving maniac before the sun came up. Jerry hadn't told Runt his plan because he didn't quite know how to complete it himself.

He'd had to give the impression that they were leaving Loon Lake. This they'd done by spreading the news in various saloons. They'd backed up the fact by buying two tickets for Thunder Landing. Then they'd gone to bed—only to leave

by way of the window at three in the morning to catch the logging train.

Jerry's problem now lay in getting off the train before it got light, and that without being hurt. The empty cars were careening through the timber at a dizzy pace. They swayed and jerked as they danced behind the engine. Every mile would mean just that much less walking for them. But would the train slow down!

Another hour brought a faint light to the morning sky and still the train rattled and clanked on. If anything the train had increased its speed.

"How much longer do I have ta endure this?" moaned Runt. "I'm so cold I could spit icicles."

"Not much longer, I hope."

Jerry watched the ground take shape out of the gloomy darkness. Everywhere was tangled underbrush and left over slashings from former lumbering operations. He could picture himself jumping off and impaling himself on one of those splinters. No jumping here.

"Get set when I give the word, Runt."

"Here!"

Jerry loosened the rope which held him, then took the chains off the packs. "Soon as we find an opening we'll chance it."

"I'd ruther die shaken to death than have my very own innards scattered all over a forty"

They must jump soon. If the men in the caboose spotted them Jerry's entire plan would be wrecked. Then, the sound of the clanking wheels changed to a hollow roar. Jerry peered down and saw a tiny lake beneath them. The train had slowed a trifle to cut the swaying as it passed over the trestle. "This is it!" Jerry shouted. "Jump!"

"Down there?"

Jerry dumped the two packs into the semi-darkness. "Jump!" he shouted again.

"But . . ."

The young timber cruiser reached over and cuffed the Runt from his perch. Then he quickly drew breath and dove downward. The cold morning air brought tears to his eyes. Suddenly he hit the icy water and plunged far beneath the surface. The shock of the cold water numbed his body and he couldn't move for some moments. Then he churned his feet and fought to the surface. A sputtering, cursing head bobbed up less than ten yards away. "You all right?" Jerry called.

"I sometimes wonder if ya got all yer buttons," gurgled the Runt, his mustache dripping water. "I'm an old man. Why do ya keep fergittin' that?" His words were bitter.

"I'm not forgetting, that's why we're here."

"You make about as much sense as apples on a pine tree . . . an' I'm cold."

"So am I. Let's get the packs and head for shore."

A half hour later the two men had a fire going in a deep gully and stood shivering in the growing light as their clothes dried. Jerry had his pack open and had the contents spread out on the limbs of trees to dry. He opened his compass and examined it to make sure the waterproofing had done its job. It had.

The sun peeked over the tops of the pines and greeted them a cheerful good morning with its warm rays. Soon the two stopped shivering and Runt cleared his throat:

"Would ya mind tellin' me jus' why we had ta jump inta a lake?"

"You needed a bath."

"I don't know how I ever lived bafore ya were old enough to take care of me." His words were coldly sarcastic.

Jerry dressed in silence for some moments. Instead of donning the clothes he'd worn when jumping into the lake, he put on his outfit used when cruising. High-top boots covered his feet. Into the tops of these were stuffed thick corduroy pants. At his hips was a wide belt with loops. On the right hung a scabbard which contained a sharp hunting knife. On the left hung a short, two-pound ax, the timber cruiser's chief tool. A heavy woolen lumberjack shirt covered his huge shoulders, but failed to cover a thick tanned V of throat. In the right shirt pocket was his compass. Finally he put on his felt cap, repacked the dried out food supplies and clothing, then hoisted the pack to his back and said: "All right, let's go."

Runt stood similarly dressed, but flat-footed. "I'm not movin' an inch 'till ya tell me what this is all about."

"Let's go and I'll explain." Jerry took out the compass, got his bearings, and started off, ax in hand.

Runt trotted beside him still fuming.

"The way I figure it, the other cruisers were killed or kidnapped because they were expected. The one who sent in the report must have gotten through and made his survey. They got him before he could get out."

"So what?"

"Well, I want to make sure nobody expects us. Complete surprise is our only chance. If we went in by way of the camp we'd show our hand. This way we're sure no one knows we're coming."

"That why ya let Miss Newbold and that pansy Charles think we was leavin'?"

"That's it."

"I don't like that guy either. I think he's behind the whole business."

"Don't be too fast. Just because we don't like him doesn't say he's guilty."

"He pulled a dirty trick on ya."

"And he knew a lot about my father. I wonder . . ."

They walked in silence for some moments. Then the Runt said: "I still don't see why we had ta git on the train an' then jump in the lake."

"It would take us two days to walk up to the timber. This way we'll be there by evening. And we haven't time to throw away if we're to get to the bottom of this business. This way we approach the standing from the rear. We might learn something before we're jumped.

"Maybe you did the right thing at that," conceded the Runt.

"I hope so." Jerry turned to the Runt. "By the way, do you know how we're going to find the place to cruise?"

RUNT laughed heartily. "Course I do. I studied that plat book and the report same's you." He dug into his pants pocket. "But I figured ya might not be as smart as ya think ya are so I made a description of the base line afterwards." He drew out a piece of paper and handed it to Jerry.

"Good for you," said the young cruiser. Then he too, drew a piece of paper from his pocket. "I did the same."

"Darned if ya don't think of everythin'," growled Runt. The two compared notes and found that they agreed in every respect.

Toward evening they stopped in a small valley. "There's the rock," said Jerry.

"An' there's that little stream."

"Looks like we hit the base line right on the nose."

"Which proves yer as good as yer pa any day."

"Three hundred yards from here toward the west . . . according to the plat book . . . lies the woods we're suppose to cruise." Jerry looked over the tree tops and his face was puzzled. "That looks like scrub timber to me."

Runt dropped his pack, following Jerry's example. "I'm thinkin' the same. Do we camp here?"

"Yeah . . . what do you say we take a look at it before dark?"

"O.k. by me."

Reaching the top of a long slope they looked down upon the land which Jerry's father had estimated at a hundred million feet of timber. When Jerry spoke his voice was troubled. "If this ain't scrub timber I never saw any that came closer to it."

Runt took off his cap and scratched his head. "That stuff ain't worth the trouble to cut it."

"We must have made a mistake."

"Maybe." Runt pronounced the word in a manner which indicated that no such mistake was possible.

"You get supper and fix the sleeping blankets while I check the base line again."

An hour later Jerry stamped into the little camp and looked into the frying pan. "You could start off this cruise with something better than beans."

"I feel like a good hefty meal," answered the Runt. "What did ya find?"

"No mistake."

They washed at the little stream and returned to camp. For some moments they ate in silence, neither one wanting to offer an opinion. A whipporwill called through the dusk and the silence was lonely. Jerry could see the face of Christine and he felt oddly moved. What was she doing now? Was Charles with her?

"This whole thing smells," said the Runt, his mouth full of beans.

"Huh . . . ?"

A twinkle came to the Runt's eyes. "Quit thinkin' about that girl, ya haven't a chance."

"I wasn't . . ."

"I said this whole thing smells."

"Yeah."

"The timber couldda bin burned over or logged secretly over a period of twenty-two years," said the Runt without conviction.

"You know darn well we could tell if fire had swept through it. And there'd be stumps left if it had been logged." Jerry's brow knitted in thought. "I can't understand it."

"The plat book and the report were all right," said Runt talking to himself.

"And the report was even bound in that wood. Sure looked like it came from the woods." Then Jerry's mouth dropped open. His fork, half filled with beans, stopped halfway to his mouth. "Runt!"

"Huh?"

"That report was wrapped in *moose* wood!"

"So what?"

"Moose wood, Runt, moose wood! Don't you get it?"

Runt's face stiffened. "Say . . ."

"That's one of the rarest bushes in this country!" interrupted the young cruiser.

"The Indian's used it to make baskets an' snow shoes cuz it's so wiry."

"And if we find some of that wood we'll know where that other cruiser had been. We'll know that somewhere around there he found the secret and was killed or kidnapped."

Runt swallowed the last of his coffee and spat the grounds out. "Moose wood! I ain't seen that stuff in years."

III

ALTHOUGH it was pitch dark Jerry, with an unerring sense of direction, strode back toward the camp. It was his third day out and he was bringing back nothing but his tired body. The wind moaned in the pines high above and it sounded eerie and forlorn.

How could he hope to succeed without a single clue! He hadn't found the moose wood on his trips into the woods and the Runt had done no better. If the timber cruiser who sent the report was no liar there had to be moose wood around somewhere. Could it be possible that the moose wood was just a trick to mislead any chance pursuer? That was possible. Still, Jerry had the feeling that a clue was always just beyond reach. He tried now to examine his emotions to discover just what gave the feeling birth.

He slapped the mosquitoes from his neck and crossed a small stream.

Born to the ways of the woods, Jerry was a natural woodsman and employed all the tricks unconsciously. He never stepped on hollow logs, never made an unnecessary sound. Neither did he outline himself against the skyline if someone were waiting to get a clean shot at him, never walked over the top of a hill. Still, that feeling of danger was always present. But how did he get this feeling? He heard an owl hoot and suddenly stood still in the forest. That was it. The birds. They were always on edge, always making little fitful noises. A hunter knows that birds are the messengers of the forest. Suddenly Jerry realized that he'd been following bird sounds. Could such a little incident be the basis for his feeling of danger?

Deep in his mind lay another problem. In those three days he'd had ample opportunity to walk through the tract of timber his father had valued at a hundred million feet. He knew it contained less than thirty-five million. Why was this the case?

Jerry shrugged his shoulders and plowed through the underbrush. Maybe Runt had turned up something during the day. If not he was at a loss as to what his next move would be.

Peering through the darkness for the camp fire, he stumbled and fell over a root. Runt certainly had the fire well concealed this time. As he drew closer he realized Runt didn't have a fire at all. Maybe he'd discovered something dangerous?

Sprinting now, Jerry broke into the little clearing and called: "Runt, did you find something?"

There was no answer. Only the subdued gurgle of the brook broke the silence of the black forest, that and the wind high in the trees. Maybe the Runt had found something and stopped to investigate! Possibly, he was lost. But that was impossible. Timber cruisers never get lost. If they did they didn't remain cruisers very long.

Arguing back and forth in his mind Jerry prepared supper. He thought of many reasons which might delay Runt. But rationalize all he might, the feeling of foreboding still wouldn't leave him. He

puttered around the fire making the preparations take as long as possible. Now and then he stopped to listen. Still nothing. Jerry ate alone. Then a shaft of lightning bit into the darkness of the sky. The angry rumble of thunder boomed through the forest.

Almost at once it began to rain. The tiny fire hissed and sputtered as large drops fell into it. Jerry crept into the tent and laid down in the darkness. His mind refused to rest. Where was Runt?

But how can I find him, Jerry argued with himself? That morning Runt said he'd try the southern direction. That could mean anywhere within a radius of ten miles, probably more. If he found Runt in that darkness it would be pure luck. No doubt Runt would come back while he was gone and go out searching for him. Then the tables would be reversed. They could keep that up all night.

And still Jerry couldn't rest. Angrily he got up, grabbed his ax, stamped out the dying fire, and entered the woods. Every fifty steps he stopped to listen. Only the patter of rain against the trees came to him. No other sound. No train whistle, no silken rustle of animals. It was a night to spend under shelter. Before a half hour had elapsed Jerry was soaked to the skin. His clothes dragged against the brush as he plowed through. On and on he went, never walking too fast, never taking unnecessary risk.

Once he stopped and listened to the sound of an animal on his trail. It could be a wolf; probably a bear. He gripped his ax tighter and hid behind a large rock. The sound died out and he continued on his way.

But this was absolutely without sense or reason. Jerry became angry with himself. He couldn't possibly hope to find Runt in all this woods. He turned back reluctantly.

On and on through the woods he sloshed. The rain was coming down faster now and in the flashes of lightning it looked as though the entire forest was under water. The eerie, brilliantly blue light made the forest seem ghostly.

And then he was plunging again in darkness. Almost to the camp once more. A shaft of lightning struck a tall pine tree to the right of Jerry and for a moment it seemed the forest was on fire. In that light Jerry saw something ahead. It brought him to a standstill as a shiver ran the length of his body.

Then he was splashing through the forest as fast as he could dodge between the trees. Was that a human figure on that little knoll ahead. It was. Jerry guessed who it was before he could identify the clothing. Runt!

HE had stumbled over a stump and was lying in an odd position. Jerry quickly turned him over. "Runt! What h . . . happened?"

There was no answer. Jerry cupped his hand and scooped water into that dirty, bloody face. Another flash of light revealed a gruesome sight. In Runt's left hand was a hunting knife. Jerry pried that knife from Runt's grip and then he noticed the blood soaked clothing which covered the man's chest. It wasn't Runt's knife. It was a knife with an exceptionally long blade and a handle of wood. Little circles had been carved around that wooden handle. Most likely, to afford a firmer grip.

Jerry slipped the knife into his belt and examined the wound. Four times Runt had been stabbed. And all the cuts were around the heart. The wounds were deep and bleeding profusely. Runt was close to death.

A moan came from Runt's white lips. Then his eyes opened. All this Jerry saw as the electrical storm rose to full fury. "Runt! It's me, Jerry." He bent closer to the other's lips.

"Moose . . . wood . . . there." Runt tried to point toward the south, but failed to complete the gesture. "Fight . . . I'm old . . . m . . . m . . . man." Runt slumped over in a faint.

For a brief second Jerry couldn't react to the situation. Why must Runt suffer for something that wasn't his fault? Runt was just a helper. He had no stakes in the final outcome.

And then Jerry Johnson's muscles contracted into little knots. It was an action jungle cats take before leaping upon their prey. Jerry peered into the darkness and his eyes burned with a grim resolution.

"Someone will pay for this, Runt . . . I promise!"

JERRY wasn't conscious of his surroundings. He didn't know that it was daylight. Neither did he know that his body kept moving forward by reserve strength alone. Before his eyes was a brilliant sheet of pain. It played havoc with his vision and he tried with all his might to quench it. He felt it in his chest, his back, his legs. Yes, his legs were the birth place of this pain.

Through the night he'd carried Runt on his back. Through swollen streams, slippery underbrush, and rugged, jagged pines. Dawn put an end to the storm, but he wasn't conscious of this either. His clothes steamed as they dried on his aching body. One goal he kept before his mind. He must get Runt to the hospital in Loon Lake.

And then Jerry saw the two gleaming rails of the logging tracks. He stopped momentarily to rest, examining Runt's wounds as he did so. No blood showed through the blanket which he'd wound tightly around the wounded chest.

He was walking again. The rails began to weave and dance. Jerry walked between those two rails and made himself follow the pattern of action no matter where it darted. In the distance he heard a train whistle; moments later, the rumble. He fought down the urge to flag the train. He must work in secrecy, even if Runt's life hung in the balance.

Once more he was between the two rails plodding onward, ever onward. The mid-day sun beat down and sapped his waning strength. Now and then he washed Runt's face in little streams, but he did this only when the stream was near the track. Jerry knew his mind was wandering, knew he couldn't trust himself to leave those rails. They meant life, and he would stick to them until he reached Loon Lake or died in the attempt.

His hand was bleeding. He saw a large splinter in his finger but left it there. He must have fallen. Still those two rails, growing faint now as the sun hid behind the trees in the west. A deer watched the weaving, stumbling figure, then turned off into a game trail. Jerry didn't see the animal.

The flame before his eyes was brighter, burned more freely. And Christine came into that flame frequently. Her lips looked cool and inviting. Her eyes invited him to leave the tracks. The weight of the line-runner on his back seemed to push harder and harder. Would this never end?

And then Jerry saw a glow in the night sky. He knew it was the lights of Loon Lake reflected against a bank of clouds. He was whimpering now, whimpering like a little child, as he cajoled, urged, and pleaded strength into those aching legs of agony.

At last the bend where he and Runt had jumped on the logging train. And then the mill. Jerry kept to the shadows and entered the mill's boiler room from the rear. A moment later he staggered into the light and pitched headlong on the warm sawdust-covered floor.

He felt hands lift him up, force warm water between his stiff lips. "Get partner . . . to . . . to hospital," he said thickly.

"Sure, bud, sure."

"No one . . . mus' . . . know."

"Mum's the word."

Jerry tried to mutter his thanks but slumped over in a deep sleep instead.

He awoke with a start and scrambled

As the lightning lit up the area Jerry saw the body.

to his feet. Then he relaxed and shook his head. The next moment he saw a man watching him. "You the fireman?" Jerry asked.

"Yep."

"Did you help me a while ago?"

"Yep."

"Did you take my partner to the hospital? Is he o.k.? Anyone see you?" The questions followed one another quickly.

"Yep, yep, an' nope."

"Thanks."

"Yep."

"What time is it?"

"Twelve-ten." The fireman opened a boiler door, looked in at the huge fire, then closed it. "Ya slept about an hour 'n half."

"Can't waste more time."

"Yer in bad shape."

Jerry looked at himself then. His hands were caked with blood. His pants were ripped and his bloody knees showed through. "Guess I must have crawled."

"Yep."

"You'd do me and this mill a big favor if you'd keep your mouth shut about this," said Jerry as he washed the blood from his hands and knees.

"'Taint none of my business nohow."

"Where does Miss Newbold live?"

"Straight down the street from the office . . . about four blocks . . . big white house."

"Thanks again."

FIFTEEN minutes later Jerry was inspecting the house from the board walk. It was dark except for a light in the rear. He looked both ways, saw that the streets were empty. He quickly slipped around to the back and knocked on the door. It opened and Christine stood before him.

He'd been prepared to keep his emotions under control. But the sight of her loveliness outlined by the kitchen light from behind her made his muscles turn to water. She was beautiful and attractive and he had to admit it to himself right there on the back porch.

"Why Mr. Johnson!" she exclaimed. "I thought you'd tucked your tail between your legs and ran for home." She laughed mockingly and opened the screen door. "Won't you come in?"

"Thank you, I will," said Jerry and strode into the clean, white kitchen.

She saw his disheveled, bloody clothes. "You been in a fight!"

"No."

"Suppose you got in a tavern brawl, lost your money, and now come crawling to me for your fare back to Thunder Landing?"

"No." Jerry saw the lunch she'd been in the process of eating and hunger suddenly swooped up to demand his attention.

Christine caught his gaze and, hands on hips, said: "Uh-huh, you're hungry too."

"I am," he answered flatly.

"Well, suppose I might as well feed you. Charles and I worked late at the office tonight and I just got back. Made myself a little lunch before going to bed." She stated this as she prepared a place. "He's still there. I don't know what I'd do without him."

"You said that the first time I saw you."

She was about to fling back a retort, then thought better of it and commanded: "Eat."

Jerry pulled up his chair and dug into the lunch.

Watching him Christine said: "You must have been hungry."

"Don't worry, I'll pay for it." He took a five dollar bill from his pocket and threw it on the table.

She eyed the money and replaced her coffee cup carefully. "You don't have to insult me. I won't take the money."

"You will!"

Something in his manner made her think twice before answering. Then she said: "What *did* you come for?"

"I'd like to ask you some questions."

"Start asking."

"Suppose we start with Charles."

She jumped up and bumped the table. "Suppose we don't!"

"Why must we always be fighting?" Jerry asked slowly.

"Because you make me so angry," she flung back, little fists clenched.

"All you have to do is answer a few questions. Since you defend Charles so vehemently there must be something wrong with him."

"Ask your silly questions."

"How did Charles react when your

father died and left the mill to you?"

"Perfectly natural."

"You wouldn't be prejudiced, would you?"

"Don't jump to conclusions."

Again her golden curls bounced against her shoulder as she emphasized her words. Jerry wanted to touch them, to caress them. "Does Charles work at the office alone much?"

"What are you driving at?"

"Just this, do you have any way of checking up on his actions, on his work?"

"I trust Charles."

"That's rather obvious, isn't it?"

"And it's rather obvious that you don't like him," she retorted in rage.

"I never trust a man who says one thing with his mouth and another thing with his eyes."

"I think his eyes are nice."

"Are my eyes nice, Miss Newbold?"

"Don't be ridiculous!" Nonetheless, she looked into his eyes. What she read there made her gaze waver. Her fingers fumbled with her fork. "I don't have to answer your questions," she said in an attempt to cover her confusion. "What right have you to ask me in the first place? My affairs are no concern of yours?"

"But they are."

"Not if I order you to leave me alone."

"Orders or no orders, your affairs are my concern," he corrected softly.

"I see you're dressed in your cruising outfit, or what once was a cruising outfit. I suppose you came to ask for that job?"

"On the contrary, I already have that job."

"You have not!" Her eyes flashed dangerously. "You ran out of my office like a coward less than a week ago, remember?"

"The next day I went to work for you."

"Well . . . you're fired!"

"You have it all figured out, don't you? When my father's reputation, and my own, are at stake I work for nothing."

"All right, I'll pay for what you've done. Call for your wages first thing in the morning. Then get out."

"Can money pay for Runt's suffering?"

During the conversation Christine had been stabbing at a piece of chocolate cake with her fork. Now, it clattered to the plate. "Wh . . . what?"

"My line runner . . . Runt. He's in the hospital right now." Jerry outlined his actions since he'd left the office. He told of getting on the logging train, of making the preliminary cruise, of his search for the moose wood, and of Runt's wounds.

"I . . . I feel like a fool," confessed Christine. "I thought you were just talking when you said you'd made a cruise. I . . . I don't know what to say, what to do."

"I'd like you to do one thing."

"Yes."

"Be sure to tell no one what I've just told you . . . especially not Charles. Can I trust you?"

Her head came up, lips quivered, but she looked straight into his eyes. "I will trust you this once." Then a frown creased the delicate skin of her forehead. "But why did you lead me to believe you were running away?"

Jerry explained his reason for complete secrecy.

"And you think Charles is one of them?"

"I do."

"Do you have proof?"

"Not a thing," Jerry admitted reluctantly. "Maybe I'm prejudiced, I don't know. But I don't trust the fellow."

"What are you going to do?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. By the way, where does Charles live?"

She gave the directions, then said quickly: "Whatever you do, please be careful."

"I think I can take care of myself by now."

Christine's gaze lingered on his huge shoulders, his bronze throat. "I can well believe it."

Wishing he could take her in his arms, Jerry bid good evening and stepped out into the night. At once he headed for Charles' residence, walking rapidly. Less than five minutes passed before he found it.

Its massiveness, its well-kept lawns made him draw breath sharply. Charles must have a large income. Through a high wire-meshed fence he saw that the house was dark. He tried the gate and found it locked. A short distance to his right stood a silver maple, one branch of which extended over the fence. Jerry climbed the tree, crawled out on that limb, and dropped down into the yard.

He landed on a dry branch and it snapped loudly. The cruiser froze in that position. The next moment he heard deep vicious snarls and whirled toward the sound. Racing toward him were three large German police dogs.

Jerry waited for no more. He lurched to his feet and ran toward the fence. The first time he failed to gain the top and fell back. A second time he failed. The dogs were almost upon him.

In desperation Jerry leaped high, grabbed the iron spikes and felt the sharp prongs dig into his hands. A moment he hung there as the dogs leaped up to grab him. One succeeded in clamping its jaws around his foot and it yanked viciously as the other two barked loudly.

Jerry was sweating against the pain in his hands. Carefully, slowly, he pulled himself and the weight of the dog upward. The iron prongs raked his ribs, but he held on, shook the dog off, and fell to the ground on the other side.

Some moments he lay there panting and gathering strength as the dogs hurled themselves against the iron fence trying to push it down. Jerry crawled to his feet and hobbled off into the shadows, determined he must return to the woods and follow up Runt's lead.

IV

AX in hand Jerry listened to the sounds of the forest. The chirping of the birds, the slithering sound of the trees swaying and brushing together in the wind, the occasional drumming of a partridge deep in the woods—all natural sounds. His eyes darted to every shadow. Nothing out of place. All morning he'd searched this section of the forest and had wandered far from camp. Ready for action he stepped from behind an uprooted pine tree and beheld a clump of moose brush. His eyes swung to the right, saw the trampled grass, the broken saplings where Runt had fought for his life.

Jerry was conscious of the fact that he'd been holding his breath. He let the air drain from his lungs slowly, but stood perfectly still. For some unknown reason the hair along the base of his skull stiffened.

Carefully he searched each shadow cast by the early afternoon sun. And then, for the first time, he noticed the magnificent stand of timber behind the moose wood. To Jerry's experienced eye it was the most beautiful stand of timber he'd ever seen. Mechanically he identified the tall jack, Norway, and white pine; the slick spruce; the pure hemlock; the yellow birch; even bird's-eye-maple—all matured stuff. The young cruiser drew a deep breath of the pine-scented air, cool and refreshing.

How far did this stand stretch? The thought hit him oddly. Certainly such timber couldn't run far! Forgotten was that feeling of danger. Forgotten the fact that Runt and the cruisers before him had come to trouble near this patch of moose wood. Jerry reached the edge of the stand and began counting steps as he moved inward.

Over hill and through valley; across rushing streams and tiny brooks; through swamps and boggy marshes the young cruiser counted. And the sun neared the horizon bringing with it swarms of mosquitoes. But Jerry felt not their sting. On and on he counted. And with every step his amazement increased. Then he hit the end of the stand, made a right angle turn and started counting anew.

As he passed through the timber he kept careful check on the various types of trees, their height, their erectness. He'd never seen such timber in his life. And then he reached the edge of the stand. It was dusk and he had to squint to see his figures as he totaled up the steps and made his multiplication. He stared at the sum, squinted, and stared again.

Eighty-five million feet!

That is, if the stand was as solid and as square on the other side as it was on the one he'd just cruised. Probably even more. The tract could run nine-five or a hundred million feet with luck.

One hundred million feet of matured timber!

Jerry murmured the number out loud. And then his mind associated the two opposing thoughts. Could it be possible that this stand was the one Christine really owned? There in the darkness Jerry cursed himself for a blind fool. No wonder that other tract had showed only average growth. It was the wrong stand of timber!

But how to prove this when the plat book and survey report he'd read agreed as to base lines and sections? His father had been right. But someone had very cleverly changed the plat book to throw the cruisers off. And they had stooped to murder in order to steal this timber.

Jerry thought of Charles at once. He handled the plat book more than anyone else. But then Jerry wasn't so sure. If one map were changed the entire plat book would have to be changed to coincide. Such painstaking work would take years of careful study. He must look at that plat book more carefully. And he must do it at once!

He darted through the forest as fast as he could run. And then he was running easier. He glanced down hurriedly and his blood began to pound through his body.

He was running on a faint path!

It was no game trail. Too wide for that. He pulled out his ax and increased his speed.

A twig snapped directly ahead and he stopped abruptly. Not a sound broke the stillness . . .

"Don't move, bo, I got this gun trained right on yer guts!" The voice was a snarl.

For a moment Jerry was stunned. His right hand held the ax and his left hovered over his knife. He tried to separate the figure from the darkness but could not. The brush rustled to his right. Carefully he weighed his chances for escape. He could throw himself into the brush at his left. And the next moment bullets would probe the spot in search of his body. A lucky shot would end his chances for success, probably end his life. The risk was too great. He waited patiently as the figures converged upon him, relieved him of his weapons.

"Follow Bill there," commanded the raw voice, "and no monkey business."

Jerry eyed the rifles and obeyed. As they passed through the forest and as it grew darker he tried to think of some way to escape. With his gaze on the back of the man ahead of him part of the time, and his occasional glance to the rear, he tried to get a pattern of their actions. But the two men made no false moves, committed no sins against vigilance. They seemed well chosen for this particular type of work. They didn't speak, didn't argue back and forth. Escape was impossible at the moment.

And then they were following the bank of a large stream. Jerry guessed they'd soon reach a camp. He was correct. Through the trees he saw a light. They entered a clearing and he noticed that the cabin was lopsided, patched with slabs of wood running at various angles. The man in the lead opened the door and stooped to enter. Jerry felt the tip of the rifle barrel against his back and followed.

A DIRTY lamp was smoking in an attempt to give off a feeble light. The air smelled foul, greasy. Seated beside a three-legged table, fumbling with a pack of dirty cards, was a huge man. He turned as they entered and his black eyes touched Jerry briefly.

The raw voice addressed the huge lumberjack. "Here he is, Blacky." He explained how they'd caught Jerry and taken his ax and knife. Blacky's eyes darted over Jerry again, taking in every detail of his clothes, his face.

"You one big dam fool, no?" The man's hands were very steady as they fingered a card. "Instead of you catch Blacky, Blacky catch you, no?" His laugh contained no mirth. "Blacky no dam fool."

The man's huge nose, flat and ugly, wiggled as he talked. Jerry had the feeling that this man was a killer. More so than the two who'd ambushed him. His face was scarred and he sat with back straight, though still at ease. Blacky's whole appearance suggested tremendous, rugged power. "You no talk, no?"

Jerry was tempted to say "no". Instead he asked, "What's on your mind?"

Blacky's smile slid into a leer. "Why you come?"

"I'm looking for three dead timber cruisers . . . and a stand of good timber."

"You find heem?"

"You ought to know. Your men found me right in the middle of it."

"An' the . . . what you say . . . teember cruiseers?"

"I can make a good guess."

"Veery bad! Veery bad!" answered Blacky shaking his shaggy head. "For that I mus' keel you, no?"

"Like you killed the other cruisers?" asked Jerry trying to bait the man on.

Blacky's eyes gleamed cruelly. His mouth snapped shut and the leer deepened.

Jerry's gaze covered the little stove, the dirty bunks, the empty whisky bottles in one corner. Sticking in a piece of wood by the stove he saw a knife, a hunting knife. And it had circles whittled out around the wooden handle. Jerry tried to keep his recognition of the weapon from showing in his eyes. It could have been the duplicate of the one he'd taken from Runt's hand.

Blacky saw his gaze linger too long in that spot. He shook his head slowly: "Veery bad! Veery bad!"

"You knifed my line runner!" Jerry accused.

The other nodded his head at his cronies. Slowly two rifles came up, pointed at Jerry. "Blacky veery sorry he mus' keel you."

Jerry's gaze darted about the room looking for an avenue of escape. Then he heard a noise from outside. Quickly he searched the faces of the others. They'd heard also.

Blacky lifted his hand and motioned one of the men to hide behind the door.

The sound grew louder and Jerry's breath came more easily. Someone was coming! Maybe it was Runt. He'd gotten out of the hospital and was searching for him. The young cruiser wanted to yell, to warn Runt.

"I'm coming in," warned the voice outside.

That voice! It was familiar . . . in a vague way. Jerry saw Blacky relax and the man stepped out from his place behind the door and threw it open.

Into the feeble light stepped Charles! But what a different Charles. He was dressed in woodsman's garb now. And none of his motions suggested a meek little man. His eyes covered Jerry and a hard smile crossed his face.

"Blacky no expect you so soon."

Charles nodded briefly to the two men by way of recognition and clapped Blacky on the back. "Good work, boys, you'll get a bonus for this."

Jerry wanted to shout something but couldn't. Could this be the Charles he'd met in Christine's office? Not a single action suggested femininity now. His clothes were tighter and Jerry could see that Charles carried a body of muscles. Even his step had a quick, cat-like spring to it. And those eyes. They were green and flashing. Jerry was angry. More at himself for misjudging Charles than at the situation in which he found himself.

"Close your mouth and don't look so stupid," said Charles, addressing Jerry. He was enjoying Jerry's confusion immensely.

"But . . . but . . ?"

"Fooled you, didn't I?"

"I'm ashamed to admit it, but you did."

The smile faded from that face, even the sagging jowls seemed to draw up to the bone of the jaw. "That's my business, fooling people." His gaze crossed with Jerry's. "Only some men have longer noses than others. Seems they can't mind their own business. Men like that don't live long. You're one of them, cruiser."

"Meaning . . ?" Jerry could feel his scalp crawl.

"Don't play innocent. You guessed long ago that I was behind this in some way or other. I saw it in your eyes at the office. If my men had obeyed orders you'd never have received that note Christine sent. Buying two tickets back to Thunder Landing was smart. Only my man didn't see you board the train. Then Christine remarked today that your line runner was in the hospital. Thought I'd better get up here and take care of you personally." He paused to let his words take effect. "You should have used those tickets while you were still healthy."

"I'll use them yet," answered Jerry, trying to keep up his courage.

Charles shook his head ominously. "You have a free ticket to where you're going."

"You can't kill me. Christine knows I'm up here and she'll demand an investigation. Sooner or later the truth will come out."

"No investigation followed the disappearance of the cruisers before you."

"You talked Christine out of it," asserted Jerry.

"And why shouldn't I? She trusts me completely. Whatever I say goes. It might interest you to know that we'll be married in the near future."

"So that's the way it is."

"Of course. When Christine's father

died I was supposed to get that mill. I didn't think he'd will it to her or that she'd have the guts to try and run it. Now I get Christine and the mill both. My plans have been built carefully. Even spent precious time making a false plat book to lead cruisers to the wrong tract of land. This timber is mine . . . or will be . . . without Christine's knowledge A husband shouldn't tell his wife everything." He stressed the last word.

"If your plans are so perfect why kill me?"

"I knew your father . . . I know you. Your kind never gives up. Besides, Christine likes you. When you don't return she'll realize you're just like your father, no good . . ."

Jerry's fists clenched and he took a step toward the taunting man. Instantly the tip of a rifle dug into his stomach and halted him. "Your type always talks big when you're well protected."

Charles' eyebrows shot upward. "That so?"

JERRY'S palms were covered with a clammy sweat. He was about to die and, like any normal human being, he was rigid with fear. Still, he couldn't control his anger. "Yes, that's so," he retorted hotly. "I've seen plenty of bullies in my day and I never yet found one who'd fight it out when his opponent had an equal chance."

"You talk big for a man whose pants legs are shaking."

At this Blacky and the two cronies laughed roughly.

Jerry felt foolish for an instant. Then he regained control of himself. "I can at least back up my words with my fists."

Charles considered a moment in silence. Then he lifted his head and looked at Jerry, his manner deeply serious. "You must die. But the manner in which you die is of your own choosing. A bullet would be quicker and much less painful. Do you suggest that I kill you with my fists?"

"You're too yellow for that," taunted Jerry, a spark of hope bubbling within him.

"Don't be so glib, young man," cautioned Charles. "How do you think I control my men, men like Blacky here. Not by money alone. A lumberjack understands one language only, the smashing of fists. Ask Blacky how he got those scars on his face. Go ahead, ask him."

"He lick me good, thees one," offered Blacky.

Jerry could see the man wasn't lying. Blacky admired Charles, that was plainly evident. Still Jerry hesitated. Was it possible that this man could fight with his fists? Certainly he wasn't foolish enough to pit his strength against a younger man. "I still think you're yellow."

"Ho! Ho!" roared Blacky, "Bes' dam joke . . ."

"You fool," hissed Charles. "I was once a professional fighter, a killer. I was banned from the ring because I broke a man's neck with a blow after his manager had thrown in the towel. You haven't a chance!"

"I'm willing to try."

Charles took off his heavy mackinaw. "Blacky," he commanded, "get out of here and let us alone." He ripped open his collar. "The man who walks out that door is the winner. If I lose, this cruiser is a free man because I'll be dead and you won't have a boss. No matter what happens no one is to interfere." Charles looked at Jerry, "Is that fair enough?"

"It's about the fairest thing you ever did." The man did have some good qualities about him at that, Jerry admitted to himself.

Blacky and the two men with rifles waited until Charles nodded, then stepped into the darkness and slammed the door behind them.

Quickly Jerry took off his coat and rolled up his sleeves. His collar, too, came open to allow easier breathing.

"Help me move this table so we don't tip it over," said Charles.

Side by side, they moved it into a corner and made sure the lamp was steady. Jerry felt an odd sensation as he stood so close to the man he'd have to battle to the end in a few seconds. It was like asking a man for a favor and then sticking a knife in his back by way of thanks. They moved the two chairs into another corner.

Then Charles swung around. "Ready?"

Again Jerry felt the muscles in his legs quiver. Maybe he was a fool to fight this

man. Maybe he was taking on a job too big for him. But anything was better than being shot down without a chance for survival. His mouth was dry and he wet his lips.

"Ready."

V

CHARLES raised his fists, protected his chin with his shouder, and moved into an odd half-crouch. The man was shorter than Jerry to begin with, now he was a small target indeed. The lazy, cat-and-mouse smile adorned his face no longer. Cruel, set, grim, it was.

Whamm!

One moment Charles was circling, the next he'd stepped in and landed a blow flush on Jerry's nose. Then he was out of range again. So quickly had the maneuver been executed, so perfectly timed that Jerry didn't know which hand had hit him. The tears came to his eyes and he blinked them away. Then he felt the warm blood tickle his upper lip. Never had Jerry seen such a cold deadly fighting machine.

Dancing in Jerry stuck out his left, aiming at the other's face. He felt the blow miss and tried to pull back. Something stung him on the chin, the head, the break of the ribs, the ear. Jerry's senses reeled and he felt the uneven logs at his back. His knees seemed to come apart and he caught his body falling slowly.

There was fear in Jerry now. A fear which he'd never known in his life. Fear that he might die in this battle. Charles was sure of himself. Jerry knew this for the other made no effort to follow up his advantage. He just stood there in the middle of the room waiting for Jerry to recover strength. His fists slowly fanned the air.

"That the best you can do?" jeered Charles.

Jerry shuffled forward, his teeth gritting together so hard they hurt. Then the young cruiser came in fast as if he were rushing. Just short of those fists he ducked and lashed out right and left to Charles' body.

But Charles danced back chuckling softly. He was enjoying this and Jerry knew it. Then Charles came in again. So smoothly did he move that Jerry marveled at the grace of the action. He saw the left flick out, rode the punch, and threw one of his own. It landed high on Charles' shoulder, not hurting him in the least.

Charles drove in again and Jerry retreated quickly. The other followed and Jerry smiled. He would try one trick, the only fighting trick he knew. Around and around the room he retreated, just beyond the reach of those stinging fists. Charles swore under his breath and increased his speed. Then Jerry stopped short and threw his left out fast. Charles caught the blow full on the chin and stopped, an expression of amazement on his face. Jerry quickly crossed with a right and it splatted against the other's nose.

Charles faltered momentarily and Jerry dove in, fists drumming into the man's unprotected body. The young cruiser felt his knuckles sink into the other's stomach, saw him bend over in pain. Panting with the exertion Jerry dropped his guard and started a punch from the floor. It was aimed at that unprotected jaw.

Then something hit Jerry and exploded in his face. His punch never found its target. Instead Charles had sidestepped and had thrown a terrific uppercut to Jerry's jaw by way of a counter. Jerry stepped into it and his head rocked back. Desperately he backed up trying to regain his balance.

But Charles wasn't smiling now. He wasn't playing. Warily he followed up Jerry and rained punches into his body. Then Jerry was against the wall. Charles pinned him there with lefts and rights.

He saw a red mist gathering at the corners of his eyes, saw Charles' shadow against the opposite wall. Left, right; left, right. Jerry sobbed as each blow landed. They didn't sting, they didn't bite. They just landed solidly and shook every bone in his body.

Even as Jerry felt himself slide to the floor those fists broke through his guard and halted his fall. The red mist was closing in now. His body had no feeling. Only his mind raced on. And the thoughts were as bitter and cruel as those fists which were pounding out his life.

Once since his father's death he'd been

trusted. Christine had been the first to really put confidence in his ability. And now, he was betraying that trust. He would die and she'd think he'd run out on her. He didn't have a chance, not one single spark of hope. He was lost. As completely as if he'd put a gun to his head and pulled the trigger.

In a daze he felt hands beneath his armpits, lifting him up. Then those fists slammed through his feeble guard and beat him down again. Like father, like son, Charles would say to Christine. Double John was crooked, so was his son.

Jerry pitched forward, grabbed the other's middle, and hung on.

"Get up and fight like a man," Charles screamed in anger. "You're not even worthy of being called Double John's son!"

Jerry had no strength to climb to his feet. But somehow he did it. "Must get up! Must get up!" he kept mumbling through broken lips.

CHARLES was a shadow now. A shadow on the wall and a shadow before him. Swaying on his feet he watched that smaller shadow and waited. He knew if he left the support of the wall he'd fall again. And he didn't bother to block those stinging punches. He was going to die, but before he did he'd hit the man one good blow—if he could. That was his only purpose and he kept it before him because he knew if he thought of anything else he'd not have the strength to make the thought return.

In and out, in and out, danced Charles. Once he backed into the stove and the black, dirty pipes crashed to the floor. Head rolling loosely Jerry still waited, still drew smoky air into those bellowing lungs. How could he hit a man who kept moving all the time? He took a step forward, found that his legs still obeyed, though woodenly.

Then Jerry saw Charles lower his head and come straight in. He didn't feint, didn't dodge, didn't weave. He was boring in for the kill and Jerry knew it. Frantically he held his right low, ready. Still Charles came straight in. Jerry started his swing, gave it power, then planted his feet solidly as the blow arched up into that face.

Jerry felt the shock of the blow run the length of his arm and up his huge shoulder muscles. Even the back of his legs shook with the contact. Charles' head snapped back and his body lunged backwards across the room, crashed against the table in the corner. It broke and spilled the lamp to the floor.

Dimly Jerry saw the lamp crack open, saw the oil spread out over the floor. Then he dove into Charles, just regaining his feet. Another right Jerry threw into that face. Again Charles sprawled to the floor. Weaving on his feet Jerry saw the man rise more slowly. Jerry stepped back to let him get up. He cursed himself as he did it, but Charles had done the same and he wasn't taking unfair advantage. No matter what the outcome.

As Charles brought up his fists Jerry threw a left into the man's stomach. Charles seemed dazed. He didn't block the blow. As the pain doubled Charles over Jerry brought his right into that face again. Charles fell flat on his face as if he'd been hit with a sledge hammer.

Jerry felt the stir of emotion in his body. He was winning! Somehow, he didn't know in what way, he was beating this man. But the thought was all he had. His body was too tired, too sore to bring a smile to his battered face.

And still Charles made a gallant effort to regain his feet. Would that man never lay still? He succeeded and looked around. He didn't see the flames licking at the cabin walls. Apparently he couldn't smell the bitter smoke. He was looking for Jerry. Then he saw him.

Jerry watched Charles advance. Both stepped in together; both threw punches together; both punches landed together; both fighters fell together. One rolled into the flames, the other toward the door.

Agonized moments Jerry lay by that door. Panting and crying he tried to drag his body toward Charles and pull him from the flames. He couldn't move. Not one finger could he lift.

Then he could hear the crackle of the flames. Could feel, too, the intense heat. The air was dense with smoke and his eyes burned as if they'd been washed in acid.

And Jerry tried to move. Couldn't even crawl to his knees and open the door!

He must! His fingers crept along the floor, found the crack between the door and the wall. He inserted his fingers and pried. No strength; no hope. Where were Blacky and the other two men? Had they witnessed the outcome of the fight and made a run for freedom?

Once more Jerry inserted his fingers in the crack and pried. Every muscle entered into the task and the door gave slowly. Now his hand was in the crack, now his arm. Wider and wider the door opened. The sweet night air entered and Jerry took a deep breath. He felt the blood gurgle in his mouth and tried to spit.

Then he was pulling his body through that crack. Slowly, so slowly. The added draught of air made the flames leap higher. The heat increased. Jerry saw his clothes begin to steam but he didn't have the strength to brush his hands over them.

His shoulders were on the crooked step now. Whimpering with exertion he pulled with his arms once more. His body tilted over and he rolled clear of the cabin. The cold night air seemed to revive him as he lay there. Slowly he climbed to his knees, then his feet.

He started to walk away from the cabin. The woods was beckoning, laughing, dancing in a gleeful frenzy in the weird light. Almost there. Almost. Jerry pitched into the first low brush and the blackness covered him like a blanket.

THREE days later Jerry Johnson stepped from the caboose of the logging train and limped toward the company office. Both eyes were swollen shut to mere slits and his face was puffed up horribly. His body was covered with large painful welts and every muscle had a special ache of its own. He wondered what Christine would say when she saw him.

As he entered her office she looked up. The pencil dropped from her hand. And she said . . . nothing. Her body, so pert, so perfectly shaped, tensed. Eyes widened in surprise. Then she cried softly: "Jerry!"

"Guess I look pretty bad, don't I?"

"Terrible!"

She was in front of him now, inspecting his face, his clothes with her hands. There was a deep concern in her eyes. Jerry saw it and held back the urge to draw her to him.

"What happened?" she asked weakly.

"It's all over." Jerry told her of his findings in the timber and of his encounter with Charles.

"You mean Charles was behind all this . . . he beat you up like that?"

"That's what I mean. Wish you could have seen him as I saw him there in the cabin." He paused reflectively. "On second thought, it's best you didn't see him. If it hadn't been for one lucky blow Charles would be standing here instead of me."

Christine shuddered. "I . . . I hate to think of it . . . now."

"If you make a visit to his house I'm sure you'll find the false plat book which he used to mislead the timber cruisers. You'll also find that he shipped a lot of lumber without billing it. Check your shipping bills with those at the freight office and you'll see why the mill has been losing money ever since you went to work."

"Why have you done all this for me, Jerry?"

"Because my father's reputation was at stake. Because Runt got knifed. Because . . . well . . . a number of reasons. You trusted me for another."

"That all?"

"Charles also said you liked me." His eyes were on hers as he spoke.

Her gaze lowered. "Charles shouldn't have said that."

"With the way my face looks I can see what you mean."

"Oh, it's not that," she corrected hastily. "He just shouldn't have said it, that's all."

"You did trust me, though?"

"I did. In fact, I still trust you."

Jerry gathered strength and courage for the next question. "Do you trust me enough to be my wife?" He held his breath as her eyes met his. What he read there made his big toe wiggle. For an instant he felt foolish, as if she could see that wiggling toe.

"I do need a new manager," she said evasively.

"For the mill . . ?"

"Well, *I* could stand one too."

They didn't hear the logging engine snort industriously as it pushed a long line of cars toward the mill pond.

The Great Hunger

By JOHN STARR

Fort Alred was just beyond the horizon. Yet here on Jack Creek was stark hunger . . . and a pretty slant-eyed halfbreed . . . and two men clawing for food and feminine favor like vicious trail-wolves.

THE COUNTRY was an unbroken whiteness. No bird, nor wolf, nor snowshoe rabbit moved from the frozen hills of the Allakelet to the wide swale of Jack Creek where, that summer, mallards had grown fat on the fish moss. Scrub cottonwoods marked the course of the stream, but their trunks were buried, and the projecting twigs, brittle in the fifty below atmosphere, seemed to have no connection with life. It was as though the cold, the silence, the lifelessness had always been, and would be until the end of time.

Then, over the rim of the void, a string of dark spots appeared and crept by slow degrees along the ridges, and at the deeper grayness that was night, they paused in a brushy hollow.

As though this miracle of life, once performed, must be repeated, a second string of dots came and followed the same slow descent. They were dog teams, far astray from the winter trail extending northward along the Nanachuk from Reed Lake to Fort Yukon.

Down in the brush where the first string had paused, a lean, bronzed man of thirty,

Riley had no chance to head off Granden. So he stopped suddenly, set himself, and rolled out the long lash of his dog whip.

known along the northern trails as Handsled Riley, kindled a tiny twig fire, and squatted close, nursing a can of tea to boil. From time to time he glanced up, keeping check on the second team's approach. When it was a mile or so away, he nodded to his companion—a girl.

"Are you sure?" she asked.

"It's Granden." And he added, "Damn him!"

As the attention of Riley and the girl deviated for the moment, one of the malemutes, a gaunt gray and tan, dragged himself on his belly through the loose snow, his small, oriental eyes on the sled. The other dogs crouched around, watching him intently. When he was a yard or so away he leaped forward, yellow teeth flashing, and ripped at the tarp.

The girl screamed, "Tan! See Tan!"

Handsled Riley rolled out the lash of his dog whip with the accuracy of an aimed rifle. The lash caught the malemute in the hindquarters and turned him over. He still tore at the tarp, but a second swing of the lash sent him away whimpering.

"He's starving," said the girl, looking after the animal.

"They're all starving."

She looked once more at Granden and his approaching team. "I wish he'd stop following."

Riley went back to his can of tea. "I wonder how close he'll come today. Yesterday he was in long rifle range."

Both of them were thinking the same thing. Granden was wanted here on the American side. He would not dare follow them into Fort Alred. But neither would he allow them to escape. He had a gun, and Riley had none. He knew that. There would be a bullet to settle the matter to his satisfaction before the flagpole of Fort Alred came to view.

Riley brought a lump of beans, frozen hard as granite, from the provisions can and laid them near the fire to thaw.

"The last," he said.

They had lost practically all their provisions when shell ice gave way on the Halfanhalf, and since then they'd been going wolf-fashion. The thawing beans gave out an odor of rich pork fat. The dogs whined greedily.

"It wouldn't take much encouragement for those malemutes to jump a man," Riley muttered. "I don't like the looks of that Natuk. He has Siberian blood and they're always worse. Give me a husky any day, or one of those Chilliwick halfbreeds. I'd even trust a wolf pureblood before a malemute."

"I wish we could feed them!"

Riley smiled. He loved the girl, but he liked her, too. There was a difference. Love was a fever pounding in a man's brain, while liking tingled with a cabin's warmth at the ends of the fingertips. Things were stripped to their elementals in this country of the long twilight and the strong cold. This girl, this unlettered daughter of a French "weasel trader" by a Yellowknife halfbreed, had made him feel both love and liking. "There she is," thought Handsled Riley, "half starving, and she worries about the dogs."

"They'll eat!" he said.

He looked at them, crouched and moaning in their half-circle, eyes on the thawing beans, and thought—"Yes, they'll eat. They'll eat Lukla first. She won't last through the next sun. And after her they'll eat Jep. But that damned Natuk—he'll keep going."

GRANDEN was less than a hundred paces away when he trotted forward, kicking up snow powder with his long webs, and collared his lead dog. He looked over at the camp with its miserable fire, and a smile broke apart the reddish growth of whiskers covering his face.

"Eat hearty!" he said.

Although he spoke no more loudly than one conversing over a dinner table, so intense was the winter stillness they could hear him plainly. Granden knew they had lost their supplies back on the Halfanhalf, and it was evident that he considered this "eat hearty" a superb jest. Then, as though to drive in his point, he slowly went about the business of breaking out a half-dozen frozen fish and tossing them to his dogs which waited in a circle.

Let by Natuk, Riley's dogs ran yapping and snarling toward the food.

Granden tossed the last fish, and leaped forward, swinging the brutal, frozen lash of his dog whip. He caught Natuk and turned him nose first into the snow. Time after time the whip found its mark until Riley's dogs retreated out of range.

Riley knew the uselessness of words, but in his fury he shouted,

"Granden, feeding your dogs in front of mine is the lowest thing a man can do in the trail!"

Granden laughed.

"Keep your malemutes to yourself, Riley, or next time I'll see to it they get food. *Warm* food."

"You kill my dogs and I'll—"

Granden laughed again. He had a gun, and Riley's lay beneath the ice of the Halfanhalf. To emphasize the point, Granden reached beneath a rabbitskin roll in his sled and drew out a .45 calibre rifle. He worked its lever action to make sure it wasn't frozen.

"It would be easy for me to get the woman back," he remarked.

"You never had her," growled Riley.

Granden went on as though he had not heard, "But I'm not going to. No, Riley, I'm going to let you live. Know why I'm going to let you live? I'll tell you. It's so I can show Lynette the kind of a man she got when she chose you instead of me!"

"I hate you!" the girl cried, in her excitement reverting to the Yellowknife dialect of her mother's people. Then, when Granden seemed not to hear, she repeated in English, "I hate you!"

Granden broke twigs and built a fire. He hung a bucket for tea, and cut a chunk of caribou pemmican—pemmican pounded out when the animals were summer-fat, and hence congealed rather then frozen. He propped the meat over the fire Siwash fashion. Its grease dripped in the fire, sputtering and smoking, giving off a rich odor that set the starved malemutes to howling. They kept edging closer, but Granden did not seem to notice. He went on humming to himself and stirring the tea leaves in the bucket.

"Tan!" shouted Riley.

Instead of returning at sound of his name, the dog leaped toward the meat. Granden had been watching from the corner of his eye. He reached the rifle, flipped it to his shoulder, and fired. Tan was knocked backward by the force of the 300 grain bullet, his blood making mist and freezing in red blobs across the snow. A second later his starving teammates pounced on him.

The girl hid her face in her mittens while Riley shook his fist impotently and cursed. Granden smiled and worked the lever in short, rapid strokes to prevent moisture from locking the mechanism.

He said, "Well, Riley, I told you I'd feed your dogs."

He squatted down eating slowly, savoring the caribou fat, licking his fingers when the last fragment was gone.

MAYBE you been wondering how I aimed to show you just what kind of fellow your Handsled Riley is," he said, speaking slowly, nudging the fire with the toe of his mucluc. "Well, I'll tell you. We're on the Sozokela, aren't we? That means Fort Alred's all of eight sleeps. More than that when your dogs are footsore and dying."

Riley made no sign of hearing, not even when Granden called Jack Creek the Sozokela. The Sozokela was sixty miles to north and west. They had missed it by swinging with the rim of the Allakelet.

Granden went on, "Now a man or a woman can get a trifle hungry in eight sleeps. I went six sleeps without grub one time, and I know."

Granden talked dreamily after the manner of well-fed men. He poked the fire and seemed to be thinking out loud.

"I recall one time over on the Peel. Jack Carney, and me, and a fellow named Lightfoot were mushing out toward Keno. It had started good, about ten below just like this trip, but it turned cold and the Peel was filled with rough ice. We only had three dogs—a couple of malemutes and a bird-dog cross. We went along pretty slow, one man breaking trail, one pushing, one on the gee-pole. Sometimes it was so bad we only made a mile or two an hour."

Riley started talking to the girl trying to drown him out, but his words came through anyway.

"Finally we started that long climb up the Ogalvie divide. That's when it got cold. Fifty or sixty below, just like now. The runners seemed glued to the snow, but we fought it through, day after day. Then the grub ran out. First we ate the bird dog, and after that the two malemutes. We threw away all except a couple of rabbitskin blankets and one rifle. Hungry? I never knew such hunger. We stewed out rabbitskin blankets, and ate the strips.

Hair and all. Tasted good, too. Just as good as this pemmican. And we ate our extra furs. But finally there was nothing left."

Granden looked over and grinned. Riley was still talking to the girl, but in dislocated, meaningless sentences, and by that Granden knew he was listening.

"Now, Jack Carney and Lightfoot were just like father and son. They'd cabined up together ever since Lightfoot first came inside on an H.B.C. steamboat eight years before. Carney'd have died for him, and I guess it would have worked the same for Lightfoot.

"We hadn't seen a living thing except our dogs since leaving the lower Peel, but just when we were dropping over the rocky ridge on the Keno side of the divide, Carney happened to stumble onto a packrat's nest. The rat got out and dodged around in the scrub spruce with Carney chasing, trying to get a shot. We lost sight of him for a while, and then, bang! We shouted, but he didn't answer. Finally we got down to where he was. Well, Carney'd killed the rat—and he'd eaten it. All! He hadn't even left the tail for the man he loved like his own son.

"You see—the hunger was greater then either of them. It is greater than any man, or any woman, this hunger of the strong cold. This white hunger. It's stronger than the love of brother for brother, stronger than the love of man for woman, stronger than the love of a mother for her child."

As though there were something humorous in his philosophy, Granden tilted his head back and laughed.

"Lynette!" he said, "back in Delta you told me how much this Handsled Riley loved you. In a few sleeps I will prove that he loves his belly more!"

Granden yawned, unrolled his rabbitskin blanket, and went to sleep, trusting the watchfulness of his malemutes to warn of any approach. Lynette watched his form, outlined as a heap in the snow, fearing to go to her own robe when Riley rolled it out.

"He won't bother us," Riley said. "He's not the kind to be satisfied with just putting a chunk of lead between a man's shoulders."

False dawn came. Riley built a fire for tea. There was no food. Granden rolled over, sat up in his rabbitskin, grinned, and laid back for some more sleep.

In the peculiar, starless darkness following false dawn, Riley and the girl set off along the brush of Jack Creek. Occasionally they would look back and see Granden, trotting easily, three or four miles behind. At the next rest he paused about eighty paces away and fed his dogs generously while Riley's famished team howled and snapped. Again he siwashed pemmican, and when he was through with licking his fingers, he said,

"On this subject of hunger—I met a fellow one time, a college professor. Piloted him in a launch over to Campbell Lake where he wanted to gather soil samples for the geological survey. He was smart, this professor, and he claimed there was nothing could drive a man as much as sex and fear. But he was wrong. He'd never felt the white hunger. I'd seen Carney and Lightfoot, and I knew."

Granden's malemutes were gentle enough, being well fed, and one after another he went over their feet, removing ice lumps. As he worked, he talked on,

"Three sleeps should put us on the Chinoko, and one more to the Simpson. By that time I figure the hunger should get in its work. Not as well as it might, maybe, but good enough. You'll see roast caribou hanging on the cottonwood twigs, and your stomach will be like a cold hand clawing at your brain. Now, when that time comes, when you strike me as being hungry enough, I'm going to cut off one little piece of pemmican." He left the dogs and got the pemmican to measure off a thin slice with his thumb. "See?—about so big. Then I'm going to toss it in the snow between you. And Lynette!—do you know what he'll do, this fine lover of yours? He'll grab it and eat it all. And if you get your hands on it first, he'll tear it away from you, and he'll eat it all. He'll eat it just like Carney ate the packrat!"

By his talk of the Chinoko and the Simpson, Riley knew the man was not familiar with this section of the country. He did not know they had followed the shortcut around the Allakelet and hence would touch neither the Chinoko nor the Simpson before arriving at Fort Alred. Instead, in either two or three sleeps, they would reach the Tillimuk, and in one more,

the Murray River. They would be close to Fort Alred there, while Granden would still believe there was a safe distance. Of course, that was not a solution. There was still that rifle to consider—and the bullet that would come whenever the fort flagpole came to view.

IT WAS a slow climb up an eight mile slope from the bed of Jack Creek. Following that was a wide plain, as featureless as the sea. After many hours, they rested, but there was no brush—no fire for tea. And hunger tore at their vitals, hunger made even more bitter by the demands of the cold.

Granden had remained in shouting distance, traveling easily in their trail, half the time riding the runners behind his well-fed team. He stopped at his usual distance and built a carbide fire. The odor of the sizzling pemmican made Lynette dizzy from hunger so she lay and buried her face in her robes.

Granden started talking again, "About Carney and Lightfoot—we all got to Keno all right, but it was never the same between those two. Carney tried to explain how it was, but Lightfoot hated him for eating the packrat. Just like the woman will hate you, Riley, when you eat the pemmican."

Next day, during the pale sunlight, they made it down to the Tillimuk. And next day brought them to the Murray, which Granden thought was the Simpson.

Riley drove the dogs, and he drove the girl. They went on, as in a dream, the awful hunger consuming them. In the false dawn, when Riley bent to fasten Natuk's breastband, the fierce malemute went for his throat. Riley beat him down with his forearm. Natuk struck the snow and twisted over. He hung there, in a crouch. The others circled for the kill, but Riley swung his whip, driving them back. He could hear Granden laughing from his camp.

Granden stayed close all that day as the sleds made a wide swing to the north. At the noonday rest he came quite close, his rifle in the crook of one arm, his long whip around his neck.

"The hunger's got you, Riley. You're headed in the wrong direction."

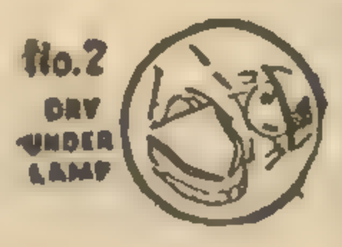
"We're headed right!" snapped Riley. "We'll sleep tonight in the valley of Jack Creek."

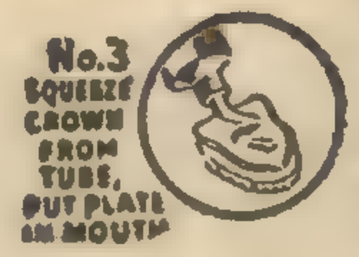
FREE OFFER for FALSE TEETH
With This Offer.

CROWN Dental CLEANER
An especially prepared antiseptic to clean plates, eliminate bad breath. FREE with this offer.

TIGHTENS FALSE TEETH or NO COST!

JUST 3 STEPS





Here's new amazing mouth comfort without risking a single cent . . . enjoy feeling of having your own teeth. Satisfy your desire for food . . . eat what you want. CROWN RELINER TIGHTENS FALSE TEETH OR NO COST. PERFECT FOR PARTIALS, LOWERS AND UPPERS. Don't suffer embarrassment and discomfort caused by loose dental plates. Apply CROWN RELINER. In a jiffy your plate fits like new and stays that way up to 4 months. No old-fashioned heating to burn your mouth. Just squeeze CROWN from tube and put your teeth back in. They'll fit as snugly as ever. Inventor is a recognized authority in dental field. A patent has been applied for CROWN RELINER to protect you from imitators. After you reline your plate with CROWN, take your false teeth out for cleaining without affecting the CROWN RELINER. CROWN RELINER is guaranteed...it's harmless. It's tasteless. Has that natural pink color. NOT A POWDER OR PASTE! If not satisfied even after 4 months, return partly used tube for refund.

EATS STEAK!
J. Clements of Algonac writes: "My plates were so bad they rattled when I talked. Now I eat steaks, corn on cob." E.W.W. of Va. writes: "I found Crown Reliner to be all you claim." Many more attest excellent results. Reline your plates with CROWN RELINER today . . . enough to last a year.

At your druggist or order direct

SEND NO MONEY
FOR CROWN PLATE RELINER
MONEY BACK GUARANTEE
CROWN Dental PLATE RELINER
RUSH COUPON

CROWN PLASTIC CO., Dept. 3706
4358 W. Philadelphia Ave., Detroit 4, Mich.

Send Crown Dental Plate Reliner and include free Crown Cleaner. I will pay postman one dollar plus approximately 24c postage. If I am not satisfied after four months, I may return partly used tube for refund. (☐ I am enclosing one dollar in full payment—same guarantee.)

Name .....

Address .....

City & Zone..... State.....

But in five hours they crossed their old trail.

Granden sat on the side of his sled and laughed. "This is the Chinoko again. You're going in circles."

Riley knew he thought the hunger had made him flighty. He watched the man quite close—scarcely a stone's throw away this time.

"How would you like a little pemmican?" asked Granden.

Granden broke twigs for a fire, and set a can of snow on it to thaw. He laid his rifle a couple of feet away on a scrap of bear robe, hung his whip over his shoulder and commenced cutting off a thin slice of the meat.

He held it up for them to see. Congealed though it was, its fatty odor set the malemutes to howling. The girl seemed delirious. She laughed and wept at sight of it. Granden came three or four steps, holding it out, and she would have gone to him through the snow had not Riley flung her back.

Granden laughed, "Oh, come! That's no way to treat a woman."

Handsled Riley screamed curses, shaking his fist.

"Give the girl a chance!" said Granden with a grim smile. "Maybe she'd like to change men!"

She crawled forward. One of her mittens had fallen off, and she reached with her bare hand. Granden advanced a little more, cocked his arm, and flung the meat, aiming it directly between them.

It curved a little because of its shape, and fell almost within the girl's grasp. She sprang toward it, but Riley was in front of her. She tried to push him from her way, but he scooped it up. Natuk was there, fangs flashing. The other malemutes lunged from either side. Granden roared with triumphant laughter.

"Eat it! Eat it quick!"

But Riley did not eat the meat. He ran toward Granden, then, with the dogs swinging for his arm, he set himself and hurled it back.

It sailed over Granden's head and buried itself in the snow behind the sled runners. The malemutes tore after it.

Granden swung his whip at them and cursed. He tried to get to his rifle, forgetting how far he had left it behind. Riley had no chance to head him off, so he stopped suddenly, set himself, and rolled out the long lash of his dog whip.

He aimed at the can of water. It leaped from the fire with a clang of metal. It overturned, drenching the scrap of bear robe, covering the steel of the rifle's mechanism with an instantaneous coating of ice.

Granden snatched up the rifle and tried to pump it, but it was locked. He could have bent the lever without budging it. Try to thaw it and the magazine would explode, No time, anyway.

Natuk gulped the pemmican; the others tore at Granden's sled, overturning it, spilling the grub can, strewing frozen fish and pemmican across the snow. The malemutes, Granden's as well as the starving brutes of Riley's team, gulped food until their sides bulged, while Granden was on them like a madman, his long lash curling feverishly.

Riley did not fight him then as he was tempted to. There was the woman to be thought of. He dodged among the scrambling dogs, seized a pemmican, and escaped with it to his camp.

His dogs came back in a little while, bleeding from the whip, ready to fall from gorging. He hitched them anyway, and drove them toward Fort Alred.

"I'll catch you!" screamed Granden, who was hunched over his fire trying to thaw the rifle. "It's still five long sleeps to the fort!"

In five hours Riley was at the edge of Gold Bench. Far below, between the purplish cutbanks of Murray River, stood a cluster of little squares and the tall flagpole.

They looked back on reaching the bottoms and saw Granden paused there, at the edge of the bench. He remained still for a long time, watching. At last he heaved his sled around. Although miles away, the silence had such miraculous quality they could hear the cry of its runners. When he swung his dog whip they could hear the pop of it. And he mushed northward, through the strong cold, into the white hunger.

the PIG WAR!

by WALTER GALLI

ONE OF THE MOST FASCINATING STORIES TO COME OUT OF THE **NORTHWEST** IS THE EPISODE KNOWN AS THE **PIG WAR!**

AT ROCHE HARBOR, WASHINGTON, STANDS A BRITISH BLOCKHOUSE WHICH IS ALL THAT REMAINS OF THE SITES OF THE "**JOINT OCCUPATION**" WHICH RESULTED FROM A **DISPUTE** BETWEEN **ENGLAND** AND THE **UNITED STATES** OVER THE **STRAIT** MEANT BY THE TREATY OF **1846** AS THE DIVIDING LINE BETWEEN CANADA AND THIS COUNTRY... THE **TROUBLE** KNOWN AS THE "**PIG WAR**" BEGAN IN **1859** WHEN AN AMERICAN NAMED **JOHN CUTLER** SHOT A PRIZE **PIG** BELONGING TO A HUDSON'S BAY COMPANY MAN.....

THE BRITISH CONSIDERED THIS A CAPITAL OFFENSE AND DEMANDED THAT CUTLER BE TAKEN FOR TRIAL TO VICTORIA, BRITISH COLUMBIA.

THIS BROUGHT CAPTAIN GEORGE **PICKETT**, WHO LATER LED THE FAMOUS **CHARGE** AT **GETTYSBURG** ON THE SCENE TO ESTABLISH A MILITARY POST AND PROTECT AMERICAN RIGHTS ...NOT TO BE OUTDONE, THE BRITISH SET UP A GARRISON OF THEIR OWN... AND THOUGH THERE WAS NO **BLOODSHED**, THERE WAS PLENTY OF HARD FEELING, BOTH SIDES BRISTLING AT EACH OTHER. THE DISPUTE FINALLY CAME TO AN END IN 1872, WHEN EMPEROR WILHELM I OF GERMANY, CHOSEN AS ADJUDICATOR, UPHELD THE U.S. CLAIM TO THE **SAN JUANS**.

MOUNTIE ON THE PROD

By TOM O' NEILL

CORPORAL Philip McGrath of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police leaned back, breathing deeply of autumn-sharp air tinged by the odor of spruce needles, and listened to the deep, drumming sound of Slave River, running cold and full between its heavily forested banks.

A swinging handcuff tinkled on the wrist of young Paris Boushard who sat on the opposite side of the campfire, finishing off his supper of salt pork and bannack.

Corporal McGrath seemed to close his eyes, but Boushard was never quite out of his sight. Watchfulness gets to a way of life after a man spends a half-dozen years in the north-country service.

"I'm not guilty, you must know that, McGrath," Paris Boushard said quietly.

McGrath shrugged. "I'm a policeman. They hand me a warrant. It tells me to bring somebody in. I do it, not reasoning whether he's guilty or not."

"No job for a man with a conscience," smiled Boushard, showing his white teeth.

Wilderness law is older and harder than the criminal codes of Ottawa. Would Corporal McGrath chance the full fury of its sting . . . forget his oath . . . for the red lips of a she-devil?

"My conscience lets me sleep. More tea?"

Paris Boushard held out his cup, the handcuffs swinging on his wrist. It was McGrath's custom to give his prisoners a little freedom at meal time.

"Just a kid," he thought, wondering if he was really a killer. Actually, Paris Boushard was about twenty-five, which was his own age, but he seemed much younger.

McGrath didn't relish this task of taking Boushard to Fort McLeod to stand a charge of murder. It was a hard land, this North. It made killers of men who might have been peaceful citizens down in civilization. If the cards had fallen differently, the two might have been on opposite sides of the fire.

This is the way it had been with Paris Boushard—He had quarreled with Steve Kampen, the great trader of the three rivers country. Kampen had for years apportioned the trapping districts of the area. Someone had to do it, so the Mounted kept its peace. Then the inevitable happened. The Boushards—there were three or four of them—challenged Kampen. They said they were given fur-poor country while Kampen hirelings received the easy pickings. They moved down on Fox river, and a Kampen man, the Cree breed called "Putois," ran his lines in the same area. There was some trouble, of course, and the Boushards accused Kampen of pirating their furs.

THE Boushards should have complained to the Mounted. They didn't. The French of Canada have never really trusted those young men of the red coats. In-

stead, the Boushards and a half-dozen renegades from the upper Black River came down on Kampen's spring brigade and took what they wanted by force. Special Deputy Blake of the Mounted, answering Kampen's complaint, went to find out the truth of the matter, but he was killed. According to testimony, the bullet that killed him came from the Winchester rifle of Paris Boushard.

Paris seemed to guess the thoughts that were running through McGrath's mind, for he said, "After all Mountie, what witnesses do you have? Only two. Steve Kampen, and that gunman assistant of his—John Black. I'll admit stopping the brigade, and I took what was ours. But I didn't kill Deputy Blake. I've never shot at a man in my life."

McGrath shrugged his shoulders. He wished the fellow could understand that there was no pleasure in taking him from the still fragrance of this Northern autumn to the stark horor of the Fort MacLeod execution chamber. It made McGrath a trifle sick to think about it, so he jutted his square jaw to prevent his real feelings from showing on his face.

"If you're innocent, you'll be turned loose," he said shortly.

Paris Boushard laughed. That laugh seemed to say: "What chance does a Frenchman have against an Englishman with the Royal Mounted calling the dance?"

"You'll get a fair trial!"

"I'm a fool to let you take me in." He lifted his left arm, the handcuffs swinging. "I'm free. I could make a run for the trees. One chance in a hundred I'd make it. Otherwise—what? You'd shoot me. I'd be better off dying out there on those clean spruce needles than in your death chamber at MacLeod."

"I wouldn't kill you, Boushard. I'd put a slug through one of your knees, and I'd take you alive. Then you'd be worse off than before, because your record would show an attempt at escape."

Paris Boushard sat hunched forward a trifle. Once in a while his eyes roved to the broad, swift river at McGrath's back, then he would look intently at the tin cup in his hand. McGrath gained the impression he was watching something on the river, so he glanced around.

A canoe was quartering the current, riding swiftly, its prow high from the weight of a girl who was paddling from near its stern.

The canoe made a slight hiss as it brushed overhanging twigs along the bank. The girl sprang lightly ashore, lifting the nose of the canoe until it was secure from the swing of the current, and then stood, hands on hips, looking at the two men.

She was slight of build, perhaps no more than an inch over five feet. She wore a short skirt of Indian-worked buckskin, a coarse blouse buttoned to the throat, tied around her head was a blue, Hudson's Bay kerchief. If the kerchief was intended to restrain her hair, it was a failure, for her hair fell in dark, curling masses beyond her shoulders. McGrath almost forgot his unmanacled prisoner for the moment, the girl was so beautiful.

"Good evening," she said, a flavor of French in her words, shifting her dark eyes from Paris to McGrath. "I am Rene Laroche. You are the policemen who just left Kampen trading post, no?"

"Yes. I'm Constable McGrath. What does Kampen want?"

"Nothing. I was going to Elk River Post to get medicine for my mother who is sick with fever. Mr. Kampen said perhaps you would let me go with you."

"Kampen must be crazy. I'm—" He paused, looking at Paris Boushard. For some reason he hated to tell the girl he was taking in a murderer.

Paris smiled slowly, showing his white teeth, and lifted his left hand to jingle the handcuffs.

"He has arrested me for murder, and he thinks you would be in danger."

"I see." The girl lowered her eyes.

McGrath said gruffly, "You must go back to the post and wait for someone else."

"But I must hurry. The medicine . . . . Please, Monsieur, is it not the duty of the mounted police to save lives as well as take them?"

He had to admit that it was. "I'll let you come along if you still want to," he said grudgingly.

She smiled and walked over to the campfire, looking at him intently with her dark eyes.

"Tea?" he asked.

She took the cup he handed her and drank with slow sips. For the first time then she spoke to Boushard.

"You are a murderer, monsieur?"

"No."

"Then why are you being taken to Fort MacLeod?"

"Because the mounted policeman has a paper which tells him to."

"A paper? I do not understand."

Paris shrugged.

"Is that true, monsieur?" she asked, turning to McGrath.

"I have a warrant for his arrest."

"But if he did not commit murder . . . But maybe this paper, this warrant, it proves he did commit murder. That is so?"

"No."

"It is all very strange. But perhaps someone saw him."

McGrath made an impatient gesture. "I'd rather not talk about it."

"But, monsieur—he does not look like a murderer. And if no one saw him—"

McGrath felt obliged to say, "Kampen saw him commit murder."

She smiled, musing and thoughtful. He couldn't help watching her, and thinking what an unusual girl she was.

Finally she said, "And if Kampen saw it, then Black saw it, too, for those two men always say exactly the same."

HER words, apparently spoken so innocently, were like a blow between McGrath's eyes. It was true—Kampen and Black had told an identical "eye witness" story.

"I do not think you should take this man to be hanged at Fort MacLeod," she said.

"There is nothing I can do about it, Miss Laroche. I have a warrant. It is my job."

"Nothing you can do!" she put down her tea. "How can you say this? You are a mounted policeman. All you need do is turn your back for one minute, and the great North country will swallow him."

McGrath decided to take no notice of her words.

"Why do you not do it, monsieur?"

"Because I have taken an oath. Because—"

"An oath that you will take innocent men in to be hanged?"

There was no way to explain it to her. He'd have a hard enough time explaining it to himself.

"Where does your mother live?" he asked.

"You will not turn your back then?" she asked, pursuing her subject relentlessly.

"Of course not. I'd rather not talk about it any more."

He disliked being short with her. She was so simple and honest. Above all, she was beautiful, and even mounted policemen, despite their pariah profession, were not blind to that.

"I see!" she said.

She sat by the fire, looking at him with eyes as soft as a fawn deer's. As though through accident she came close. Across the fire, Paris leaned back, handcuffs still swinging on his free wrist, eyes on the tall spruce tops overhead.

"I am sorry, monsieur," she whispered, her warm breath so near it seemed to caress his cheek. "Because, if you do not free him, I shall have to free him myself."

There was a note in her voice. He jerked straight, and his hand flew to the butt of his service revolver.

"No, monsieur. I do not wish to kill you."

He felt a pressure against his ribs. He recognized it—the pressure of gun steel. He sat, scarcely breathing. He did not glance at her. He did nothing which would startle her. He said,

"Think what you are doing, girl."

"I know what I am doing," she answered with the old softness back in her voice. "I am saving my brother from dying."

Her brother! Of course—they had the same dark eyes, the same quiet resonance in their voices. He was a fool for not having guessed.

Paris Boushard was standing now. He walked over, a powerful youth though beneath average in stature. He reached down and plucked McGrath's revolver from its holster.

McGrath stood up and walked a short distance before turning around. The girl seemed quite calm, covering him with a short-barrelled American revolver.

He said to Paris, "If you loved your sister, you wouldn't let her get into a thing like this."

"I do not want to die!" muttered Paris.

"We will get you again—and your sister, too. By this act she becomes a criminal, too."

"You would not dare. She—"

"It is not for me to choose. It is the law, and the law is bigger than any man who enforces it. It's bigger than the judge who decides from its printed words. It's even bigger than the men who write it."

"The law!" cried the girl, "What chance do French people have against you English and your law!"

"I'm not English. I'm Irish."

"It's all the same."

"No!" said McGrath fervently. "It isn't."

"But you will not catch us. Our North—it is very wide. I know of valleys where the feet of white men have never stepped. These forests go on and on to the great barrens, and the great barrens go on to the end of the earth. You will never find us after tonight, monsieur."

"You're wrong. I'll find you. If not me, then someone else. Think it over before it's too late."

It was plain that Paris was doing just that—thinking. He stood, head lowered, looking at the ground. His sister moved impatiently,

"Do not listen to him, Paris. Let him talk of his English law. We, too, know a law. It is the law of the bush, and it is older than the criminal codes of Ottawa."

Paris found McGrath's keys and removed the handcuffs. He stood with the cuffs in his hand for a moment, evidently debating whether to clamp them on McGrath's own wrists. Then, muttering something, he hurled them into the swift-flowing Slave.

It was not the act of a criminal. A criminal would put them on a lawman's wrists to forestall pursuit.

The two Boushards lifted both canoes into the water.

"Sorry to leave you afoot," said Paris.

"I'll get along."

"*Adieu*—and forgive me," said the girl, a new softness in her voice.

"I'll be dropping in on you one of these days," answered McGrath.

"No, monsieur. You will never see us again."

The slow, Northern twilight settled over the broad river as they paddled away, pulling the police canoe. He could see them as a dark blur against the brighter surface of the water until at last they dissolved from view against the deep shadows of the encrouching spruce forest.

Yes, he would drop in on them one day—and if not he, then some other member of His Majesty's Canadian Mounted Police. One year, two years, five years—time was not the important thing. The Mounted always got its man.

II

McGRATH rolled up in his point blankets and closed his eyes. He slept in feverish snatches, his mind teeming with visions of dark, girlish eyes, a velvet voice—and a gun.

He arose before the sun. It had frosted during the night, turning the grass to silver, forming a sparkle of ice across the unemptied tea-can. McGrath stamped some warmth into his cold-stiffened moccassin boots, shredded a few scraps of aspen bark to start a fire, and cooked his customary morning bannock.

When the sun came up, turning the spruce tips yellow-green, he headed north along the river bank, travelling with a swinging, ground-consuming stride.

Rain commenced falling with a continuing monotony late in the afternoon, and he spent the night in a hastily constructed lean-to. About noon the next day, with the sun groping for holes in the mud-colored overcast, the forest broke away in an area of stumps and brush-skraggle, and he saw the dozen long buildings of Steve Kampen's trading post.

This was the moment he dreaded—the moment of facing Kampen. It is not an easy thing to admit failure to an enemy—or, in the case of Kampen, to a person he mistrusted and disliked.

He crossed the clearing, rounded the corner of the largest building, and strode up the three log steps to its front door.

He paused there for a few seconds while his eyes became accustomed to the darkness inside the big room.

"You! What the devil?"

It was Kampen's voice, resounding with a savage note, like the bark of a malemute.

McGrath caught sight of him striding from the small, rear room where he kept his accounts.

He was a tall, deep chested man, this Kampen, with muscles forged by a youth spent in the brutal labor of the great brigades. His face was big boned. His lips were bloodless and cruel. His eyes had a quality McGrath had once seen in the eyes of a prowling carcajou. The passions of the man were stamped on that face, and a discerning man could see the qualities that had made him feared through all the three rivers country.

"Where's your prisoner?" Kampen demanded, pausing in mid-room, hands on hips, his carcajou eyes on McGrath's empty holster.

"He escaped."

They were the hardest wards McGrath had ever been forced to speak, so he ripped them out with defensive shortness.

Kampen's face turned gray beneath his north-country tan. Veins corded up on his forehead, his fists knotted like sledges at the ends of his hairy arms.

"Escaped!" he roared. "You let him escape? You sneak back here with your tail between your legs, your gun gone, and tell me you let that killer escape? Why, you—"

"I don't intend to take insults from you, Kampen," McGrath said. He spoke without raising his voice, but there was an intensity about it that made it carry to the last corner of the big, cluttered trading room.

Three or four Chipewyan Indians, attracted by the angry voices, crowded around the door. A heavy, stooped man with shifty little eyes came from a back room and paused behind the blanket counter. This was John Black, Kampen's assistant. Following him came a snaky Cree breed—the same Putois who had the trouble with the Boushards over on Fox River. "Putois" was French for skunk, and by the appearance of him, he was well named.

Kampen said, "So you don't intend to take my insults!"

"I do not!" McGrath felt better now that they had come to grips. His old confidence had flooded back through his veins, and he once more felt like a corporal in the Mounted, a man who commanded respect. He went on, "As a citizen of the Dominion, I owe you an explanation. I am here to give it to you."

Kampen's lips twisted in a sneer as he said, "Well, let's have this explanation of yours."

"We were camped near Moose Creek. The prisoner was taken from me through the aid of an accomplice."

"And who was this so-called accomplice?"

"I am not free to say."

McGRATH had no intention of revealing the girl's identity to Kampen. His reasoning was logical. There was a good chance Paris Boushard did not kill Constable Blake. If he was innocent, then someone, like this very Kampen, was the real killer. The less Kampen knew the better.

"So, you are not free to say! Was it a man, McGrath—or was it a woman?"

"I told you I—"

"There's a girl from that wolf den of the Boushards over on the Laird side. A girl who would fight the devil. A very beautiful girl I might add, Corporal McGrath. Some men would give anything they own for a woman like that. Perhaps you—"

"That's enough, Kampen!"

"Ha! then it was the girl. I heard she was in the country. So you traded your prisoner for the red lips of a girl! For—"

"I said that was enough!" McGrath's voice cracked like a whip. His fists were clenched, and the muscles of his arms knotted beneath his service blouse.

Kampen's fury had mounted. He waited a second, his eyes meeting McGrath's, then the frayed string that held his temper seemed to snap. He lunged forward swinging the back of his hand to McGrath's mouth.

In McGrath's years with the force such a thing had never before happened to him. It was an insult, and more than that, it was an insult to the organization he represented. He stepped back, a trickle of blood coming from his split lips. Slowly he removed his blouse with its insignia of authority. He laid it across an ammunition

box, and, with a deliberateness which made the action unexpected, smashed a left to the big man's jaw.

Kampen grunted and shook his massive head. McGrath followed, shifting his weight and coming over with a right. But Kampen was ready, and rode out the blow with a lightness surprising for one of his bulk.

They paused, facing each other—McGrath with the advantage of youth, with muscles as quick as spring steel; Kampen with his size and a crush,ing strength which compared with the strength of an Alaskan bear. His advantage, too, was his knowledge of every brutal trick in the rough-and-tumble repertorie of timber crew and York boat.

A smile found its way across Kampen's bloodless lips. He welcomed the opportunity of using some of these brutal tricks now. He would teach this pup, this Corporal McGrath, a lesson he would never forget.

"Off the books?" he asked. "Just man to man?"

"Just man to man!"

Kampen roared out a laugh. He feinted and drew a left-hand blow, just as he had expected. McGrath, he could see, was an orthodox boxer—a good boxer. And this was as he wanted it. He feinted again. He took the left high on his cheek. There was the shift. The right was on its way.

Quick as the strike of a cougar, Kampen's left hand flew out. He seized McGrath's right fist. He drew it across and down, tilting McGrath off balance. For an instant the left side of McGrath's face was exposed. Kampen jacknifed his mighty right arm and swung it, smashing his elbow to McGrath's jaw.

It was like a swung club. It was the kind of blow that rattles a man's teeth, and shakes his ribs loose from his vertebrae.

Kampen stepped away, smiling through his strong teeth.

"That is one I learned when I was a boy with a York crew. You Mounties should spend a little time at hard labor."

It took McGrath a second to regain himself, so he crouched, weaving defensively.

Police training was no advantage for a battle like this. The Mounted had taught him to use a gun with speed and deadliness; it had taught him to box for purposes of conditioning and recreation. However, the art of rough-and-tumble had not been deemed necessary to uphold the supreme dignity of the government in Ottawa.

McGrath came in, a bulldog expression on his weatherbeaten face. He came on, knowing he was playing into Kampen's hands, but unable to force himself to fight otherwise. It was not in his nature to fight a waiting battle.

THEY tangled near the wall, Kampen ripping up with his thumb to find the soft arteries of McGrath's throat. McGrath made the maneuver miss, and connected with a solid right. They were close, flinging rights and lefts when unexpectedly Kampen went over sidewise.

He struck the wall with one shoulder, hip on the floor. He laughed triumphantly, and hooked a toe behind McGrath's knee. McGrath was snapped forward, knee bent, fighting for balance. Kampen twisted to his back, and his other foot flew out like a released piston.

It smashed McGrath in the groin, paralyzing him from the waist down.

He lay writhing on the floor, unable to see, unable to breathe. How long he was there he did not know. Perhaps ten minutes—perhaps twenty. He finally stood up and looked around. He would have continued the fight, but Kampen was gone. His office door was closed, so evidently he had gone in there. A dozen Chipewyan and Yellowknife Indians stood along the counter, viewing the strange sight of a beaten Mountie with the blank faces of their race.

A trapper by the name of Jinks Harney came over and handed McGrath a cup filled with whisky and water.

"Drink her down, son," he said, his gray whiskers revolving slowly as he chewed tobacco.

"Thanks." McGrath drank the liquor. It made him feel better.

Black was over there behind the counter, leaning on his elbows, grinning. The halfbreed, Putois, was in the back of the store, roosting his moccasins on the stove rail.

"Well, I guess I got licked," said McGrath without apparent rancor.

Jinks Harney nodded and answered in a scarcely audible voice,

"It's no disgrace to be beaten by them kind of tricks, son. Not the *first* time, anyhow."

McGrath put on his blouse with its insignia of authority, and he was once more the law—a representative of the only law north of Athabasca.

He walked to the counter where Black leered at him and said,

"I want to buy a gun."

Black did not move. "We ain't got any—for sale."

"I said I wanted to buy a gun!"

A door opened, and McGrath turned to see Kampen coming from his office. The fight seemed to have refreshed him. He was smiling.

"Black—sell him anything he wants. What's gotten into you, anyway?"

Black shrugged, reached under the counter, and pulled out a box containing a dozen assorted revolvers.

Kempen stretched out his hand. "Let's shake, McGrath. I didn't mean to hurt you so badly. I thought you understood the maneuver."

"I will—next time."

Kampen did not miss the significance of the words. He smiled with a fine show of sincerity, but his eyes were hard as chipped ice as he shook McGrath's hand.

McGRATH was in no particular rush about starting after Rene and Paris Boushard. The two had a good lead, and the rivers of the bush country left no trail. He decided to wait. A day, a week, a month—the time involved was not so important. It was better to walk in to headquarters with your prisoner after two years, than to show up in two weeks with a good excuse. Like a trapper he would wait to make his set until his quarry had built the habits of security.

He lined up a new outfit and chose a campsite a half-mile down the river. Next day he spent sitting by the door of the trading post. Several trappers drifted in for winter supplies, but none of them dropped a hint of the Boushards' whereabouts.

About noon the rain started in again, harder than before, beating a monotonous drum-drum on the shakes of the roof.

"It'll turn to blizzard one of these nights," said Jinks Harney who was putting away the last of his winter grubstake.

McGrath watched Harney walk down to the canoe which was tied up at a little, log pier jutting into the Slave. Darkness came early, and McGrath buttoned his jacket to his chin, and pulled down his hat preparatory to going outside.

"Better stay at the post tonight," said Kampen, looking up from the pack of furs he was grading.

"Thanks, but my camp is snug enough."

Kampen shrugged and went on with his task. The furs had been brought in by a tall old Cree from the Nonacho. They were early season and poorly furred, but there was no excuse for the downgrading that Kampen did. The Cree took what was given him knowing from experience it would be useless to argue.

McGrath left the protection of the porch and headed down against the rain now being whipped in by a north-east wind. The river had turned to foggy gray in the coming darkness, willow and buckbrush were bent under their load of rain. In ten minutes or so he reached his camp which was snug and dry in the triangle of three spruce trees.

He was surprised to see a fire already blazing. The old trapper, Jinks Harney, was there, waiting for him.

"Thought you started out with your grubstake," McGrath said.

"I did, but I came back."

"Been here long?"

"An hour maybe."

McGrath shook off his hat and dried the backs of his hands which were covered with cold rain. He watched Harney's face, lit in strong lines by the fire which was eating its way into the heart of a fallen spruce log. Knowing trappers as he did, McGrath refrained from hurrying him.

At last Harney said, "Paris Boushard never killed that Constable of yours. You must be smart enough to know that, McGrath."

"I'm just a policeman with a warrant. I—"

"Don't give me that sparrow chatter,

Mountie. I've heard it before, from older redcoats than you—but just the same I never saw one that wouldn't rather bring in a guilty man on his own than an innocent one with a warrant signed by the head commissioner himself."

McGrath knew it was true. "Are you guessing about that murder, Jinks?"

"Not by a jugful! I know a heap about this business. A whole heap more'n I ought to know for my own good."

"Did Steve Kampen murder Blake?" inquired McGrath.

"No, but I'm willing to wager that halfbreed Putois did. You see, Blake was too smart for his own hide. He had a hunch there was plenty of trap robbin' over on Fox River, so what did he do? After the Boushards stuck up that brigade, we went around diggin' up all the facts. He arrested Paris, and started back with him to give the low-down to the authorities at MacLeod. But Kampen got wind of the business and sent Putois out to ambush him."

"How do you know all this?"

"I didn't dream it up of a summer night, Mountie."

"Did you see Putois shoot Blake?"

"No. I didn't exactly see it. But I saw Putois trailin' him up the river, and I happen to know that Kampen and Black were twenty miles away when they were supposed to have been eye witnesses." Jinks grinned and spat at the fire. "In other words, I know just enough to get my head shot off if Kampen ever got wind of it."

McGrath dug into his pocket portfolio and brought out indelible pencil and writing paper. Briefly he wrote down Jinks Harney's story and handed it over.

"Sign."

"What for?"

"Just in case Kampen *does* find out."

Jinks shied away from the paper for a while, but there was a command about McGrath's attitude that was hard to refuse. So finally he took the pencil in his twisted old fingers and scrawled his name.

"Thar! and if you want my judgment I just signed my own death certificate."

"Maybe I'll have something to say about that," said McGrath quietly. "By the way, where's this valley where the Boushards are supposed to be holed up?"

"That," yawned Jinks, "ain't part of my available information."

That night the wind died and the rain turned to snow, coming thickly in big flakes. On the third day a thaw set in. McGrath expected a week or so of warm weather yet before the strong cold howled down from the barrens.

"You don't seem to be making much headway in your pursuit of the Boushards," remarked Kampen one day.

"I'll take care of my end of it," McGrath answered.

"What do you mean by that?" Kampen flared with his first outright show of anger since their fight.

"Just what I said—I'll take care of my end."

"But not *my* end—is that what you mean?"

"I'll take care of your end as long as it suits the purposes of the law."

Kampen strode from the room. He closed the door of his office and spent the remainder of the afternoon there. Next morning he was gone. He returned in five days, nodded to McGrath who was sitting in his accustomed place by the shards," remarked Steve Kampen one day.
to talk with Black.

III

KAMPEN was up to something, but McGrath pretended not to be suspicious. A couple of days later men started stringing in from up the river—rough, fur renegades of the York boat crews, a former petty thief that McGrath had once arrested in Athabasca Landing, a couple of Assiniboine halfbreeds chased off their American reservation. They gathered at the trading post, and stood around guzzling from Kampen's whisky keg, talking in private voices.

McGrath had an idea what was coming. Kampen and these roughs were planning to take things in their own hands and raid the Boushards.

McGrath asked, "Kampen, where is this valley where the Boushards and their outfit are supposed to be holed up?"

Kampen had been drinking, and he was in a dangerous mood. He saw that his renegades were watching, so he swag-

gered over in a bullying manner, taking his time about answering.

"I asked you a question," said McGrath.

"Why do you want to know?"

"So I can accomplish my mission."

"So you can arrest them and take them to the snug safety of your MacLeod jail, and then, I suppose, turn around and get a lot of so-called evidence against the substantial business men of this area. Oh, I know why you've been sitting here with your ear cocked. You've been trying to get something on me!" He laughed, "No, mountie. I'd rather you didn't arrest them. *Much* rather. Anyway, I don't know where their damned valley is located."

He was lying about that of course. He knew, and he was getting this gang together to take the law into his own hands. Kampen was a magistrate, and the law thus gave him the privilege of organizing a posse whenever an area's regular enforcement was unavailable or insufficient.

McGrath had two courses open for him. The one was to return to MacLeod and lay the cards on the table to prove Boushard's innocence and Kampen's guilt, his other course was to reach the Boushards and either talk them into surrendering, or else put them on their guard for what was coming.

The decision was not hard to reach. He would warn the Boushards.

McGrath spent the remainder of the short, autumn afternoon in his accustomed place, pretending not to hear the taunts aimed his way by the renegades who were drinking in the rear of the post. When night came he purchased a few items of food and struck out through the north wind for his camp.

The trail had been muddy, but now it was frozen and rough. His moosehide moccasins made scarcely a whisper on the solidified earth.

There was an overcast, and the knifing wind brought in occasional pellets of snow. It swayed the leafless willow trees, and hunted openings in McGrath's field blouse. He was thinking that he would have to stop at the Indian village up at Pine Point on Slave Lake for a skin parka, and maybe a rabbitskin blanket and some mucs before hitting the north trail.

He stopped suddenly without reasoning why. His camp was forty or fifty steps away through a bramble of willow and highbush cranberry. He listened. A Canada jay was raising a fuss over there, squawking in a querulous manner.

It was a cold night, and McGrath knew that the jay was being disturbed by something. Maybe it was a sneaking weasel—or maybe it was a man.

McGrath drew his revolver to make certain it was free of pinched leather in his holster, and he went on, maintaining an even pace as though he suspected nothing. The jay had stopped for a few seconds, and there was no sound save for the slight hiss of the snow pellets, and the moan of the north wind.

Perhaps the commotion meant nothing. Steve Kampen was not a fool. He would not murder a mounted policeman within sound of his own post.

The three spruce trees were just ahead. He walked across a little opening where snow was making silvery streaks in the lees of grass clumps and fallen wood. The jay was scolding, rustling branches of the willow tangle as he hopped back and forth. McGrath's nerves were stretched tight, like a string ready to break.

An ordinary person, a man fresh from civilization, would probably have sensed no movement, but a man becomes somewhat of a forest creature in the course of years spent close to nature in the woods of the North. His senses are not drugged by indoor living—they return to something approximating their primeval state when man, dressed in the skins of animals, battled sabretooth tiger for his morsel of existence.

So, although the movement was scarcely discernible, it cried out to McGrath, causing him to sidestep lightly from the trail just as the shadows beneath the spruce trees were cut by gunflame.

It was so close he could feel the concussion strike him, although the bullet was a good three feet to the right. He struck the ground shoulder first, drawing as he went. He fired, pulling the stiff double action of the new gun three times. It would have been better not to have shot at all, and he knew that as he pulled the trigger, but sometimes a man is unable to prevent himself from fighting back.

An answering bullet plowed frozen pellets from the earth an arm's length from his cheek. McGrath shot again, aiming at the flash. Brush was crackling as a man plunged to escape. Like most killers, the fellow had developed a slimy streak when his ambush failed.

McGRATH tried to follow him. He found the bent brush where the ambusher had forced his way, but beyond the forest was an ocean of darkness with tree branches waving in the wind.

The fellow would circle back to the post, McGrath knew, and there would be no way of proving anything.

If there had been any doubt in his mind about Kampen, this attempt at murder had removed it. Kampen must have suspected the amount McGrath knew, or else he would not have tried the ambush. Anyway, it was war from here on.

McGrath rolled up his belongings, shouldered the pack with an Indian hitch, and cut back along the river's edge to the canoe dock.

There were a half-dozen canoes beached nearby. He chose an eighteen-footer belonging to Kampen, lifted it over the young-ice which was forming a crystal shelf along shore, and found the swift current of the river.

The north wind showed its fangs as he drew deeply on his paddle driving the craft to mid-river. It hunted out the openings in his uniform clothes, and the hard bits of snow it carried felt like hurled shot against his cheeks.

But for all that, McGrath smiled. It was like dropping a heavy packsack, this leaving Kampen's post. The time for waiting was gone. The great north-country lay before him. And in the darkness he did not see the gray storm clouds of windigo, or hear the roar of wind—rather he saw the dark eyes of a girl, and heard the tones of her dulcet voice.

Two days, and he was at the marge of the Great Slave. Generally crystalline, its waters were now gray with storm. He hunted the shore, keeping his canoe quartering the rough water as he made it to the village of Beaver Indians at Pine Point. There he purchased a parka of buskskin with wolverine edgings, a rabbitskin blanket, mukluks of moosehide with heavy soles chewed the shape of a man's foot by the teeth of tireless squaws.

At the mouth of Fox River he turned south, and he followed up its tributary, the Pont Ciel, to the snow-covered country of pointed hills where Jinks Harney's cabin stood.

"I still want to know where to find the Boushards," he said when he found Jinks making a martin set on a pine branch.

Jinks set his gray-stubbled jaw and went ahead with his business. "I ain't one to squeal on decent folk," he said finally.

"You don't understand. Kampen has brought in a gang of upriver renegades to clean the Boushards out. He's a wilderness judge, and that gives him the right under the law to make all them special deputies. He knows where to find the Boushards, but I couldn't get it out of him."

"You want to warn 'em?"

"Yes."

Jinks considered the matter, his old blue-gray eyes becoming shrewd slits in his leathery face.

"I believe you, mountie!" he said at last. "I believe you're on the square."

"Then you'll give me directions?"

"I'll do more'n that. I'll take you there. Go alone, and it's likely somebody'd shoot you."

There was a foot of snow, so Jinks hitched three cross-breed dogs to a toboggan. They made good time after crossing Hay divide to the west where the country reached away, purple and limitless, toward the first ragged line of the Rockies.

"Never thought I'd be takin' a mountie to Noire valley," Jinks muttered over the cookfire. "Don't know as it's very smart—for either of us. Them Boushards are likely to shoot us."

"They're decent people," said McGrath complacently.

"Yes, but they're forest folk and fond of their freedom. Especially old Pierre—he's the uncle. He'd shoot us both in a minute if he thought it was a plot to get him inside an English jail."

The Noire River, a tributary of the Liard, was flowing beneath first ice that was in most places too fragile to hold them. They were forced to go slowly along the rocky banks through forests of

white spruce.

At mealtime, McGrath opened his pocket map. The Noire was marked with a dotted line.

"Might as well throw it away in this country," grinned Jinks.

EACH night it became colder, and a new layer of snow crystallized from the air. The going became heavy, and the men were taking turns breaking trail for the dogs when Boushards valley opened before them.

There was a long, log building down by the river, and a dozen cabins scattered among stumps and second-growth spruce.

"Well, you're safe for the moment," said Jinks as they swung into the half-clearing. "They'd take you for Injun in that outfit."

Their approach seemed to go unnoticed save for some sled dogs which started yapping behind woven-wire pens. A sled trail swung from the river to make a circle of the cabins, and McGrath jerked the guide pole around so the toboggan fell into it. He then noticed that a man stood with rifle across his arm, watching through binoculars from a cabin they had passed.

Jinks collared his lead dog before a huge door of whipsawed plank which led into the long, log building. He started towards it, but it was flung open and a thick-set man of fifty or so stood facing them.

"Hello, Pierre," said Jinks.

Pierre blinked. "Ha! Monsieur the Jinks! Welcome! So perhaps you too have been chase out by those Kampen, no?"

"No, but I'm likely to be if this trip backfires."

"So?" When Jinks made no immediate effort to explain, Pierre turned to McGrath. "You are welcome, Monsieur. Any friend of Jinks, he is welcome here."

Pierre motioned them through the door. The room they entered was large and unheated. Its floor looked like it had recently been danced on, there were split-spruce benches lining the wall, at one end some sacks of provisions had been stacked up until they touched the ceiling. Pierre hurried to get ahead of them and open a second door which led to a room that was mellow with the heat of burning logs in a fireplace.

Pierre turned there, smiling. He was a powerful man with a few streaks of gray in his thick, black hair and beard. He called to someone in French, and then showed powerful, white teeth in a smile,

"We are ver' happy to have you as our guests."

"I don't know whether you will or not," said McGrath.

"Ho! You speak lak one fool!"

"But I—"

"You have perhaps had the trouble with the mounted police. So Jinks brings you here to be safe. *Bien!* That is good. As long as you are honest you are welcome. We ask no questions here."

Pierre strode to a door and called, *"Cheri!* Come, my little one! Do you not make tea for the guests? And one of them is young!" He gave McGrath a tremendous wink. "Young, and ver' handsome, *ma cheri!"*

There was a patter of moccasined feet. An unexpected excitement filled him. He knew who it would be. It would be Rene Boushard. In the weeks which had passed since their meeting, his memory of her had been dulled, but all the original impressions came rushing back now. He recalled her beauty, her dark, understanding eyes, the quiet music of her voice.

The door swung open, and she stood there, looking only at him.

Pierre watched them curiously. He looked at the girl, and back at McGrath. A baffled expression mounted his face.

"What is thees? Why you say nothing, Rene? Is this the way to meet our guests who have traveled far through the strong cold?"

"I am sorry, uncle," Rene smiled.

"This is Monsieur Jinks, and—"

"I have met both of them before," she said softly.

"So?"

McGrath guessed she did not intend to reveal his identity. He said, "Sir, I must tell you who—"

"Please!" It was Rene, and there was command in her voice. She opened the package of tea and stood with it, her eyes meeting his. "I must ask that you say nothing."

Pierre spread his hands in a gesture

of astonishment, "What is it my little one has been up to? Does she then have secrets with all strange men?"

"Not *all* strange men, *mon oncle.*"

"Ho!" He shook his bushy hair and roared with laughter until the room seemed filled by it. "Ol' Pierre, he understand. Pierre was young once too. He will say no more. Come, you gray-whisker Jinks! Come over to chimney corner with me and try not to have eyes in back of neck while young folks make tea, no?"

McGrath seated himself on a peg-slab chair and watched Rene make tea. She kept her eyes on the pot until the leaves settled, then, without looking at him, she poured. Finally she brought her up over and sat in a chair nearby.

He wanted to say something, but her nearness made his thoughts scatter. She was the one who spoke first—in a voice too low for her uncle to hear,

"You should not have come here, monsieur."

"But—"

"Do not try to explain. Not now. You must wait until we are alone."

After finishing her tea, she said, "If monsieur will come, I will help care for the malemutes."

Four men of the valley were standing near the door when McGrath and the girl went outside. Apparently none of them recognized him as the mounted policeman.

"Well?" asked McGrath when he had walked with her beyond earshot.

"You have come to arrest me, monsieur? They will never let you leave this valley alive."

"I have not come to arrest you, nor to arrest your brother, either."

"Then why—"

"I have come to ask you to surrender. All of you. Let me take you to the judge at Fort MacLeod. Let's put your story in front of him."

"An English judge? What chance would we have? We would be in prison, all of us, and Kampen's men would take over the trapping grounds that are still ours."

"You will get justice, I promise it."

"No, Monsieur, it can never be." She stood, facing him, her dark eyes serious. "And now, for your own safety, you must leave."

He shook his head. "I must tell you that Kampen and a gang of renegades are on their way to this valley right now."

She drew in her breath. "Then you came to warn us? You really did not intend to take us to MacLeod?"

"If I had my way, the only reason you'd ever go to MacLeod would be to testify against Kampen and those back-shooting snakes he has working for him."

She nodded. "I believe you, monsieur. *I* believe you, but unfortunately many of the men here in our valley will not. They will think it is a trick to send us all to prison."

"That is a chance I will have to take."

"Wait! You must not tell them who you are. Say you are Monsieur—Jones. That is a common name, no? You will be Monsieur Jones until I think it is safe."

"I didn't come here as a plain clothes man."

"Please—for my sake!"

She said it so sincerely he could not refuse her. "But how about your brother?"

"Paris? He has gone down the Laird for supplies. He will not return for perhaps seven days."

"And what then? When he recognizes me—"

"You must be gone when Paris returns."

They went back inside. Jinks Harney was moving uncomfortably in his chair. When Pierre left the room for tobacco, McGrath explained the situation.

"I don't like it!" he said. He looked at Rene and asked, "Do *you* trust us?"

"Yes."

"All right then, tell Pierre and the others anything you want to, but we'll be in the devil's own fix if they find us out by accident."

IV

THEY told their story about Kampen, and that afternoon the men of the settlement held a pow-wow. There were six of them in addition to Pierre—Lewis, an elder brother of Rene's, two of her cousins, both of them young men, a half-breed Yellowknife, and two men of middle age who had been in trouble over on the Pelly.

What that Pelly River matter was, McGrath had forgotten, a fact that relieved his conscience a little for he certainly had his hands full without shouldering the problems of Division H.

One of the young men was sent up river to stand lookout duty, and the other men went to work getting the valley ready for a siege.

For two busy days the work went on. On the second night McGrath tramped a trifle wearily to the room he shared with Jinks at the big house and sat down on the edge of their puncheon bed. He was looking at his blistered hands when Jinks came in.

"Reckon you never figured on swingin' a grub-axe when you joined up with the mounted," Jinks chuckled.

McGrath admitted that he hadn't. "This place is as near ready as it will ever be. I think we'd better hit the trail tomorrow."

"Worried about Paris comin'?"

"Yes. It would go hard with us—and I'd hate to think of the position Rene would be in."

Jinks leaned over with an understanding smile parting the tangled whiskers in the region of his mouth,

"She's a right attractive gal, ain't she, son?"

McGrath fell asleep while Jinks was still unknotting the lashings of his muclucs. He did not hear the old man come to bed. He slept soundly, and then, with a suddenness that jarred him, he came awake.

He lay listening, looking into the darkness of the room. Over at the right, a small window covered by parchment let in a faint night glow. There was no sound save for Jinks' breathing.

He closed his eyes and tried to recapture his sleep, but his mind was too filled with thoughts. He kept thinking of Rene, and wishing he could stay there in the valley with her. He thought of MacLeod with its big, log barracks sitting in the middle of its unused parade grounds, its ugly and practical jail of log and cement, the flag on the peeled-spruce pole being raised and lowered with the regularity of the sun. And he thought of his severe, unfriendly room in the barracks, and compared it with the warmth and friendship of this valley.

Dogs were yapping in their pens, and McGrath thought about Kampen. Those dogs might be the first warning of his approach if the lookout failed.

Two men commenced talking outside. He wondered what they were doing at such a late hour. He listened, trying to pick up their words, but the voices faded away. A board squeaked somewhere in the big, log building. Another squeak, and he picked up the sound of footsteps moving somewhere.

They seemed to be far away until the latch of his door rattled, and its wooden hinges made a low, complaining sound.

It was too dark to see, but he sensed that someone was standing there in the open doorway.

A breath of air came from the other room, and with it, striking him like an electric shock, an impression of Rene Boushard. It was the subtle perfume of her hair, her body. She was waiting for him.

He sat up, creaking the puncheon bed.

"Philip!" she said, her voice soft, but vibrant with urgency.

It was the first time she had ever called him by this name. Always before it had been "Monsieur." It gave him the feeling that a new bond had been forged between them.

He slipped on his clothes and walked towards her. It was cold in the room, for he had been asleep many hours and the fires had died.

He groped for a moment, expecting to find the door but instead his fingers touched the back of a chair.

"Philip!" she whispered.

He reached toward the voice and touched her shoulder. He had forgotten how tiny she was. McGrath was only average—about five feet eleven—but she seemed like a child.

He could feel her tremble a little, as though the cold was finding its way through her thin clothing. She had on a robe which seemed to be silk pulled tightly about her. Perhaps it had been a gift purchased by Pierre when he took his brigade to civilization. McGrath had always seen her dressed in buckskin or the coarse woolens of the fur country, and it was strange now to find her in silk.

"Philip, you must go!" she whispered.

HE did not seem to hear what she said. The dark accentuated rather than removed the impression of her nearness. It was natural for his arms to pass around her waist, and as natural for her to come to him, not hesitantly, but with the unreasoning eagerness of iron drawn to an electric magnet.

She whispered, "Philip, please! You must not. You must leave. I do not want you should die."

But as she was speaking these words, she resigned herself to his arms. For the moment, danger and fear were far away, and there was only the two of them, secure in their island of contentment, shut out from a savage, howling world.

He leaned over, expecting to find her lips, but instead he buried his face in her pine-fragrant hair.

"Rene!" he whispered.

"Philip—not now. Sometime, Philip. You must go now, Philip."

"I will never leave. I will stay here with you, Rene."

"I did not tell you. Paris has returned. He will recognize you. They will kill you, Philip. They will think you are trying to lead them into a trap. And me—you can see how it will be for me, Philip."

Her words were like a sword, cutting them apart. He stepped away.

"When did he come back?"

"Only a moment ago. He is down at the pens, feeding the dogs. He will be up in a moment, wanting a cup of tea. You must go while there is time."

"Harney!" he said.

Jinks was awake. "I'm goin' too!" he said, sitting up in the puncheon bed.

Jinks felt around for his clothes, cursing under his breath when he could not find them. McGrath located his own parka with Jinks' lying on top of it. He drew on his mukluks, and tucked the lashings in their tops without tying. Rene was in the kitchen rolling up a sackful of provisions.

Philip took the sack from her hands. There was no lamp, but he could see her in the starlight reflected in from the snow.

"Rene, you love me?"

"Yes, Philip," she said simply.

"I will come back."

"In the spring, Philip?"

"Yes, or before."

Jinks Harney made an impatient movement. "For God's sake, mountie, let's get out of here before it's too late."

They started toward the door, but someone could be heard walking through the big room.

"This way!" whispered Rene.

There was no time. The door swung open with a draught of winter air from the bleak storeroom. A match came to life, and in the uncertain flare of it, McGrath saw the face of Paris Boushard.

PARIS felt around for the kerosene lamp and touched the match to its wick. He replaced the chimney and turned around.

Perhaps McGrath could have escaped at that moment, but it seemed cowardly. So he stood there, his parka hood tossed back from his head, facing dark-eyed Paris Boushard.

Paris stared at him for a second, his expressive face a study in amazement. He glanced at his sister, and at Jinks, and then back again.

"You! McGrath!" he whispered. His hand moved toward the gun which was held in a belt passed around the middle of his parka.

"No need of that," said McGrath.

"You will not take me out alive, monsieur! You will not take me from this valley to die in your prison at MacLeod. You mounted policemen have captured me twice, but you shall never do it again!"

Rene came close to him, laying her hand on his arm. "Paris, do you not understand? This man—he did not come to arrest us."

"Then why did he come?"

"To warn us that Kampen is on his way to destroy us."

Paris let his suspicious eyes move from his sister to McGrath and back again. Then he shook his head violently.

"No! He has fooled you with his words, but he will not fool me. I know these mounted police for what they are. They will use any trick they can think of to take us prisoners. And that is why he came, Rene, to play such a trick!"

McGrath spoke quietly, "Paris, I love your sister—"

"You would even tell me that! It is all a trick, Rene. Don't you see?"

Aroused by the voices, Pierre came

through the door, buttoning his shirt. He looked around.

"What is thees?"

"This man—he is a mounted policeman," said Paris.

"Dieu!" Pierre shook his shaggy black hair. "Is thees true, monsieur?"

"Yes. My name is not Jones. It is Philip McGrath. I am a corporal in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police."

Paris added, "He is the policeman from whom I escaped down on the Slave."

Pierre spun on the girl, "You knew?"

"Of course, *mon oncle.*"

Pierre exhaled. Fury lined his face. He shook his fists at the ceiling. "Pah! Then why did you help him? Why—"

"Because he did not come to arrest us. Because he came to warn us of Kampen and—"

"You believe that? You are a child."

"But—"

"Rene, leave the room!"

She faced him for a moment, but finally, with lowered eyes, she obeyed.

Jinks came forward, "It's true that varmint of a Kampen is on his way out here, Pierre. McGrath doesn't think you're guilty. He wants to dig the truth out of this mess and send Kampen to that cage of his at MacLeod."

"He has fooled you, too, old man—or are you in with him?"

Pierre left Paris to guard, and quickly made a round of the cabins, rousing the occupants.

"You got us in a hell of a fix now," Jinks complained.

Paris overheard and asked, "Then you admit trying to trick us?"

"I admit trying to save your dumb, French skins."

Pierre returned and built a fire in the big front room, and the men of the valley took their places on benches pulled close to the heat. Added to those McGrath had already met, were a couple of men who had been away with Paris. One of these was a trapper named Lawrence who had been chased from the three rivers country after some differences with Kampen, the other, an undersized old fellow, McGrath had never seen.

Pierre made a short speech, explaining the facts as he saw them. Then he nodded to McGrath.

"Tell your story now, monsieur of the police."

McGrath stood and faced them. He explained why he had come, speaking slowly, trying to make his words carry the conviction of sincerity, but their faces soon told how useless any words were. He sat down, and Pierre nodded to Jinks.

"We will hear from thees old man now."

"I just want to say you're bein' a bunch of woodenheaded damn fools!"

Pierre shook his head with a hard smile. "No. I theenk thees mounted policeman has fool my ol' friend Jinks, too. Paris, you will take thees prisoner to ol' fur room. Bar the door and come back, for we mus' have your vote."

They were locked in the fur room where Jinks moaned, "We're finished!"

McGrath agreed. There was not a chance. He had seen that in their faces. "And now what?" he asked, more of himself than Jinks.

"Why now I reckon they'll draw lots to see who gets the job of hangin' us."

"Of course we have one slim chance. Kampen might attack."

PARIS had set a candle on the floor. It lit the room, casting huge, wavering shadows up the walls. There was a window above the level of their heads, but not even a small child could have squeezed through it. The walls were peeled and squared spruce, dovetailed at the corners, and more than a foot in thickness.

"We'll never bust out of here, mountie," said Jinks, watching McGrath stand on a bench to inspect the ceiling.

"I could move a couple of those beams if I had a bar."

"Yep, and I could chop my way out with an axe."

They could hear someone walking that way, so McGrath let himself down and was sitting beside Jinks when Paris opened the door.

"All right!" the young man said, motioning to them.

He stepped back down the hall, hand on the butt of his revolver when they came out. There was no way of escape. They walked back to the large room where the men were assembled.

Pierre stood up, slowly, taking a deep

breath. The words he was about to say seemed to come pretty hard.

"Monsieur Jinks, we have talk thees over and decide you were made fool by policeman. You give us your promise to tell no one else about our valley, then we set you free."

"You're a bunch of danged fools!" Jinks blew up. "You think this place is secret? It might have been once, but—"

"In all our years, thees is the firs' mounted policeman to visit us, monsieur."

Jinks spread his hands in a wide gesture of resignation. Pierre turned to Corporal McGrath.

"And you, monsieur of the police, for you I have the very sad news. You mus'—die." He breathed deeply, as though the word had taken the breath from his lungs. "You mus' understand that we are not murderers. This is the firs' time we have killed. But it must be, or you will bring your many redcoat police here to take us away from our homes and kill us in your jail at—"

"There's no safety for you that way, Pierre. You have heard the saying—'It's suicide to kill a mountie.'"

"We will take our chance on that, monsieur."

Pierre made a signal to one of his men. It was Lawrence, the fellow whom Kampen had driven from the three rivers. He had evidently drawn the executioner's lot, and had little taste for his job. He walked past McGrath, a trifle pale and unsteady, not able to meet his eyes. He found a rope and, with lips so tightly drawn they looked bloodless, he selected a rafter.

"You don't waste much time," said McGrath with a hard smile.

"Monsieur . . ." Pierre shook his head sadly. "It is not the happy task. It is better for all to have it done quickly, no?"

There was a sound outside, a squeak of a light foot in packed snow. The men jumped and held their breaths, waiting, wondering who it could be. The door opened, and a cloud of vapor formed which concealed the person for a moment. The vapor vanished the instant the door was closed, and Rene stood there in the lamplight, looking from one man to the other. To McGrath's surprise, she was dressed in parka and furs.

One of her large fur mittens was off, and her hand looked very small against the billowing fullness of her parka.

Pierre started to speak, "Rene, I told you—"

"You have decided to kill him?" Her voice was soft, with a deep tone like the murmur of the river beneath ice. It was the voice that McGrath had learned to love, but tonight there was that other quality about it—that sound he had heard the first night back on the Slave when she had stopped him with that simple question—"Please, monsieur, is it not the duty of the mounted police to save lives as well as take them?"

Pierre spoke, "Rene—I told you to leave. This place, it is not for a girl."

"This is not the place for any Boushard, *mon oncle*. Are we murderers as Kampen says?'

"Rene, you will go!"

She did not move. Perhaps in all her life it was the first command of Pierre's she had refused to obey. Pierre was a trifle unnerved by her attitude. He stood, opening and closing his large hands nervously. He turned to Paris.

"Take your sister away."

Paris moved forward, but he saw something that made him stop.

"Rene!"

Her hand flashed up—a swift, practiced movement. There was a gleam of blued gunsteel, and she was holding a revolver, the same short-barrelled revolver she had pointed at McGrath that evening back on the Slave. It had been carried in the pocket of her parka, and hidden by her beaver mitten.

And so she faced them. For the moment there was no sound except for logs snapping in the fire.

McGrath took a step towards her, his heart pounding as though it would leave the prison of his ribs. He felt like shouting, and laughing and crying all at once. It meant the difference between living and dying, but it was more than that: it was the exultation of seeing this woman—*his* woman—holding the high card in this land of strong men.

He noticed that his course was making him block the line of fire so that one of the Pelly River men might draw—but the amazement of that fellow was such he never thought of his gun.

Pierre got his breath, "Rene! Put away that gun."

Light was riding high in her eyes when she answered, "I, too, am a Boushard, *mon oncle!* You taught me to shoot this little gun, and you know I do not miss. So do not try to stop me."

Pierre breathed deeply. Exhaling, he said, "You would not kill me, Rene!" He took one slow step forward.

"Back!"

He took another step.

"Back!"

There was something in her eyes that stopped him.

"You *would* shoot, Rene!"

"Yes."

"Why are you doing this?"

"Because he did not come to harm us. And because . . ."

"Because you love him, Rene."

"Yes, because I love him."

"You are a Boushard. We have always loved better than we have hated."

"Turn around and face the wall."

The men obeyed. Lawrence, the would-be executioner, for the first time met McGrath's glance. Lawrence was almost as relieved as he was.

Rene asked, "You will come, Monsieur Jinks?"

"You're gol darn tootin' I'll come!" yipped Jinks, doing a polka step. "I was plumb scared I wasn't bein' invited."

The girl backed to the door, the revolver in her hand not wavering. McGrath retrieved his own revolver, and a big-bore lever-action which he tossed to Jinks. She opened the door with her mittened hand, letting in another cloud of vapor, and the three disappeared into it as they ran outside.

It was clear and cold with a million stars seeming to ride the fragile spruce tips. A sled and a string of eight malemutes was waiting. Rene seized a whip and rolled it to the lash end with a pop like a rifle.

"Mush!" she cried.

McGrath heaved on the handles to spring the set from the runners. Jinks swung the gee-pole. Rene ran forward and seized the collar of the lead dog, and they were swinging swiftly around the far end of the building by the time the door opened.

Men were shouting back there, but none of them were ready for the trail. The sled made it through a clump of spruce, down the drop to the riverbank, and it was smooth going then along the deep-covered ice of the Noire.

V

THE last few nights had been cold, with the thermometer dropping to thirty below, and the ice of the Noire was solid. They covered a dozen miles before dawn came up with a reddish streak over the spruce-covered hills.

At noon they paused by a cut-away bank to build a breakfast fire. While Rene and McGrath were frying pancakes and smoked venison, Jinks climbed to the top of a little hill to watch for signs of pursuit.

"Where are we going?" asked Rene.

McGrath thought a moment. "I haven't decided."

"You will take me to prison, Philip?"

He didn't know whether she was joking or not.

"Of course I'll not take you to prison."

"I took your prisoner away from you at the point of a gun."

"The Superintendent of Police does not know that."

"Philip." She came close to him as he bent over the fire and clutched his parka sleeve. "I know of a place—I visited it when I was a litle girl. It is beyond the three rivers where the waters flow south to the Great Slave. It is a valley where trees are big, like the trees of Athabasca, and the cold winds never blow. We could go there, Philip, you and I. We could be happy, and neither Pierre nor your police would ever find us."

He looked into her eyes—dark, with their subtle changes of light. They were mysterious. They were like the spirit of the girl which flowed so deep, with the quiet strength of some unmapped river of the North.

It would have been easy to resign himself to this spirit of hers. He wanted to go with her to the valley she spoke of, for even though it proved to be a stretch of frozen muskeg in the fastness of the great barrens, it would be a paradise if she were there.

He bent over the fire, not daring to look at her. He was torn between two worlds,

between his oath to the mounted, and this new-born call of man for woman. One of the malemutes whimpered at the smell of smoked venison, and he thought of those cross-breed dogs of the Peel which chewed the leish strings of their harness to escape and run with the wolf packs from which they had descended. And so it was with him. It was the call of the primeval pitted against all the artificial restrains he had loaded upon himself under the name "duty."

"You must not ask me to go with you," he said, not daring to look at her straight on.

"Why, Philip?"

"Because I gave my word once—to the police. I must serve. If I deserted now I would cease to be a man in my own eyes."

"I see," she said softly.

He wondered if she really did.

"Nobody in sight," said Jinks Harney, sliding down the band and bringing a shower of loose dirt and snow with him. "Where are we headed, mountie?"

A minute before, McGrath had been unable to answer that question, but he did not hesitate now. "I'm going to find Steve Kampen and put him under arrest, and I'm going to arrest John Black and Putois, too."

"You're a gol danged fool!" yipped Jinks, hopping around the fire. "That's what you are—you're a double-danged fool, and if it weren't for the gal sittin' yonder I'd say that I really thought of you."

McGrath grinned, "Sit down and have some venison, Jinks."

"Listen, McGrath, you better be sensible. You go upriver to MacLeod and explain things to the superintendent. Get yourself some reinforcements."

"He'd probably put me on guard detachment and send Mayberry."

The took the trail again, mushing steadily through the hours of the short, winter day. At supper, Jinks was still snorting.

"Two men might do it—with luck." In the middle of his meal he hopped up and said, "Well, swear me in! I always was a danged fool."

"Swear you in? What are you talking about?"

"Swear me in as a special constable. You got the authority, and don't say you haven't."

McGrath tried to argue the old fellow out of it, but he ended by administering the familiar oath.

"Yipee!" shouted Jinks, doing his favorite polka step. "Hyar I am a member of His Majesty's Royal Canadian Mounted Police!"

Rough ice on the Noire made the going hard. They took to the woods along shore, slept a few hours, and arose in the gray, arctic twilight before any hint of dawn was in the sky.

It was cold, with poplar branches snapping from the ice in their hearts. The sky had a heavy color through which only the brighter stars shone. Far to the east a smudge of purple had risen to hang over the spruce tops.

"Smoke," said McGrath.

There was no comment. The same thought was in all their minds. Steve Kampen and his renegades had reached the Noire.

A swing up steep country with all three helping the dogs finally brought them to a ridge with a view of the river. It was treeless going for a few miles, then a struggle down slopes made rough by windfalls. In the late afternoon, McGrath climbed a tree to take a good look over the country.

He came down and said, "They'll make camp on the bottoms just above the falls."

"Kampen? You saw them?" asked Jinks.

He nodded. "There are fifteen or eighteen and a couple of dog strings."

Jinks jerked the tarp off the sled and started unpacking grub. "What's the idea?" McGrath asked.

"Thought you ought to have a warm meal inside you before you got your head shot off."

"Before *we* get our heads shot off, Jinks. You're a special constable now, don't forget that."

McGrath hunted dry aspen twigs from the bottom of a gulch and built a smokeless fire. They ate, scrubbed their tinplates with snow and spruce needles, and repacked the provisions box. McGrath then dug into his pack for two sets of handcuffs.

"I'd lay case-card odds you didn't need

them things," muttered Jinks. "If you take that damned Kampen out it'll be with his feet pointed east."

McGrath shrugged as though the matter was one of indifference. He glanced at his revolver and placed a cartridge beneath the hammer bringing the number to six. During all this time Rene had been silent, watching him intently, her smooth young face inscrutable.

He turned to go and said, "I'll be back, Rene."

The girl lost control of her emotions for a moment, and she ran to him.

"Philip!" she whispered, reaching her small hands to his shoulders.

McGrath leaned quickly and kissed her. Then he put her away from him.

"Philip," she said. "You had better take my gun, too. It—"

"Keep it. You may have to use it. And stay here in camp!"

Night was settling with gray swiftness over the hilly spruce country. Down a rough hillside, broken by projecting volcanic rock, the ice of Noire River could be seen. They found a snowed-over trail around the twenty-foot falls, now a mass of ice, and caught sight of a little, brushy park where the smoke from a cookfire was rising.

McGrath led the way along a zig-zag opening in willow and aspen brush beside the river, finally stopping not fifty paces from the campfire.

A short-legged malemute with bird dog blood got his nose in the breeze, and made a run at them, hitting the end of his chain with a snap that twisted him half way around. He set up a baying, but one of the Assiniboine halfbreeds walked over and booted him along the neck until he quieted down. The Assiniboine didn't bother to find out what he was barking at.

Three or four of the renegades were up a hillside, hacking dead limbs for firewood, the rest were squatted near the fire, watching a lanky old renegade who did the cooking.

McGrath caught sight of Kampen beyond the fire, sitting on a rolled-up rabbit-skin blanket, in conversation with Black and Putois.

"Give me a sawed-off and two ounces of buck and I'd fix it up so you wouldn't need them danged handcuffs," whispered Jinks, moving nervously from one foot to the other.

"Take it easy," muttered McGrath, crouching down.

"Damn it all, I'll die in my own way."

"And stop the talk about dying. You make me nervous."

"Well, what do we do?"

"We wait. I want Kampen to come over on this side of the fire. I want to get his hands in the air in a hurry. If I do, the rest will be a lot easier."

"And what do I do?"

"You get the hammer back on that old .405 Winchester of yours and Putois in the V. He's a coward, like all back-shooters, so he won't go for his gun in the open. He'll make a sneak for it, but if a slug from that old smokehouse of yours connects we'll be lucky to find his scalp and moccasins."

Jinks chuckled, showing his first enthusiasm of the evening.

"And then what?"

"Why, then it's up to you to show that alacrity in the cause of duty which, according to police regulations, is required of every special constable of the mounted police."

"In other words, I get John Black next. Or maybe I should down that varmint of a Jim Langsten that Kampen brought up from Athabasca. He cheated me at cards one time."

"This is not time for personal grudges."

"It won't hurt to combine business with pleasure, I reckon."

This sort of business was not exactly new to McGrath. He'd gone into hostile crowds before to arrest his man. The important factors were surprise, a bold front, and the drop. He estimated at least a fifty-fifty chance of coming out with the three men—Kampen, Black and Putois—without having to fire a shot. With these out of the way, he need have no fear of the rest. Hired killers always acted about the same.

The odor of frying bacon arose, setting the dogs to yapping. Kampen was still seated on the bedroll, talking to his lieutenants.

"It's just a detail of course," whispered Harney, "but what charge have you got to back up this arrest?"

"Murder."

"On my testimony?"

"Your testimony is enough to make the arrest. I'll lay November mink against August muskrat that either Putois or Black will offer to testify for the crown before we reach Macleod."

The cook beat on a tin bucket, calling the men to supper. Kampen got up, looking huge as a silvertip bear in his drill parka with long-furred hood.

He picked up a plate and strode over to be first at the food. Black and Putois followed him, filling their plates. All three of them came over to stand between McGrath and the fire.

It was exactly what McGrath had been waiting for. He stood, drew his revolver, and walked from the brush into the full view of the men around the campfire.

HIS stride was deliberate and unhurried. His parka hood was back so the fur edgings would not interfere with his vision. His right hand, holding the gun, swung carelessly at his side. His two sets of handcuffs were thrust through a belt he had cinched around the waist of his buckskin parka.

He took a dozen steps before anyone noticed him—then it was a dark, heavy browed man standing at the end of the grubline. In his surprise, the man said nothing. He just stood here, letting his jaw hang.

One of the Assiniboine breeds glanced up, recognized him, and barked out a startled curse. The rest looked then, and Kampen, whose back was turned, last of all.

McGrath was only five or six strides away by then. He leveled the gun, and his voice rang across the clearing.

"Steven Kampen, you are under arrest. Putois, you are under arrest. John Black, you are under arrest."

The three groups of words rang from his lips with startling impact, like three separate bursts of rifle fire. They left the gang of renegades standing helplessly. Putois tried to fade back, but a knifelike glance from McGrath halted him. Black was hunched over, turned a bilious color, his hands clutching his tinplate. Even Kampen lost his composure for a second.

"You are a fool, McGrath," he finally sneered, letting his plate drop from his fingers.

"Put out your hands!" McGrath jerked a set of handcuffs from his belt.

Kampen twisted his lips in a smile, "McGrath, I might as well tell you—there's a gun aimed right between your shoulder blades at this moment."

McGrath did not allow his eyes to wander. He thought it was only the old, old trick of the trapped criminal.

"Put out your hands!"

Jinks Harney shouted from his place in the brush, "McGrath!"

At the same second, McGrath sensed the movement. There had been a lookout posted down by the river. He leaped sidewise as two guns crashed—one of them the deep throated .405, the other a spiteful high-speed small bore.

He glimpsed the lookout from the corner of his eye—a renegade in fur cap and red mackinaw. He had been hit by the 300 grain slug from the big Winchester, and the force of it had driven him shoulder first into the snow, dead after three sucking gasps of his lungs.

The back-shooter had failed, his bullet rattling away through the frozen twigs of aspen and willow, but he had broken McGrath's grip on the situation.

The renegades ran from the line of fire—most of them plunging ignominiously toward the woods.

Kampen sprang to one side, drawing a heavy calibre automatic from his waist. He tried to spin and shoot, but McGrath was not where he expected,

He caught sight of Jinks Harney swinging the barrel of his rifle, and dived headlong to the protection of a heap of bedding, and then crawled on, kicking the snow like a swimmer, until he was behind a half-unpacked heavy Alaska freight sled.

From that point of momentary safety, Kampen commenced bellowing curses at his retreating men. They did not seem to hear him. They were running for shelter, not knowing whether one man or a dozen was waiting out in the brush.

For the moment, Kampen could not see McGrath, but the back of one fleeing renegade was broadside to him. In his rage he aimed at that back. His automatic jumped in his hand, spitting its fired cartridge in the air. The blunt-nosed bullet plopped as it struck the renegade between the

shoulders, and the man plowed face foremost into the snow.

"Stand and fight, you damned cowards!" Kampen bellowed.

BLACK, who was too cowardly even to run, was snaking his way toward a clump of buckbrush. Putois, crouching, spun on his moccasins, reaching the grub box, drawing a long-barrelled .38 revolver. He hid there, watching through a crack in the box as McGrath moved the shelter of the bedrolls, trying to bear down on Kampen.

McGrath did not see Putois' head sneak into view over the top of the box The .38 revolver came up, sights leveled . . .

Again the .405 roared. Its bullet plowed through the grub box, smashing its contents. The flattened bullet struck Putois with a sledgehammer's impact. Putois went double. The scream that started from his twisted lips was never finished.

He was smashed backward. He rolled once, and ended almost at Black's feet. Black was belly down in the buckbrush. The brush was straggling and leafless, but in the deep twilight it made perfect concealment. Black, however, did not realize that. He had seen the flame of Jinks' rifle plainly enough, and he imagined its next bullet was being aimed at him. He looked at his revolver, its barrel jammed full of snow. He tossed it aside and wailed.

"Don't shoot! For God's sake. It was Putois and Kampen did it. I'm innocent. I always been a good citizen . . ."

"Then crawl over here and surrender to Special Constable Jinks Harney of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police! McGrath, dang ye, toss over a set o' them handcuffs!"

McGrath heard him, but he did not dare show himself. He was moving along in the concealment of some bedding in the direction of the freight sled where Kampen had dropped from sight.

It became quiet. A couple of renegades were shouting at each other over in the timber. Darkness was settling in rapidly, and the brush where Jinks waited was a deep blur.

"Toss me some handcuffs!" He could hear Jinks shouting. "I got me a crown witness here. McGrath, where the devil are ye?"

McGrath bellied forward through feathery snow until the gee-pole of the freight sled came into view. Another foot and he could see the criss-cross rawhide work of its freight hamper. The moment of his greatest danger was approaching—the moment when he must emerge into the open from the concealment of the bedrolls.

There was no stopping. He was the hunter, and he had to go on.

He dug his fingers into the snow, pulling his way forward, eyes waiting for the first telltale movement from beyond the sled. Slowly the sled came into view—its runners lying deep in soft snow, its long freight hamper still heaped two-thirds full of bedding and provisions.

Now the upper hand was his. He had full view of the sled. Kampen would be unable to shoot without exposing himself.

McGrath said, "Come out with your hands up, Kampen. The jig is up."

There was no answer, so McGrath repeated the command. Still no sound. He moved on, rising a little. He stood until he could see beyond the sides of the sled. Kampen was not there.

He looked for tracks. The snow was beaten down by many feet.

He looked around the clearing. There was only one direction a man could have escaped without revealing himself, and that was into the timber to the north and east.

McGrath jerked a set of handcuffs from his belt and hurled them in the direction of the brush where Harney was cursing, then he struck out across the clearing. He soon found a set of mucluk tracks leading into the timber.

He expected a bullet from Kampen every step he took, but he went on at a swift wolf-trot. It was almost dark there in the spruce. The tracks followed sidehill for a while, and then cut down to the river. For a moment he thought they were going to continue up the hillside to the camp where Rene waited. He smiled grimly, knowing how that girl could take care of herself. But the tracks curved back beyond the river ice and followed the shore.

The deep, gray darkness of early night had settled in now. It was the time between sun and stars when a man's eyes are useless. McGrath went slowly, hunting the trail. After a half-hour or so, the

grayness dissolved from the air, and the stars came through striking the snow with bluish light.

it went up the Noire. McGrath kept on it went up the Noire .McGrath kept on it with his swinging, ground-eating stride, not pausing as the long, winter night wore away, and as the gray of morning silhouetted the spruce-ragged horizon.

Most of the time Kampen had kept to the ice of the Noire, or within sight of its banks, but now his tracks cut across a shoulder of land which had been washed over at one time a few years before and now was choked with young spruce.

VI

THERE was a tiny clearing beyond the young growth, and at the far side of it, a trapper's line cabin.

McGrath came to a stop. It was an ideal ambush. He decided to circle through the trees. A pistol shot broke the winter quiet, and McGrath felt the whisk of a bullet four or five feet to the right of his cheek. He thanked his stars that Kampen had nothing better than an automatic.

McGrath weaved through thick timber, circling the cabin in case Kampen should attempt to escape. The automatic again, raising a rattle of winter echoes. Kampen was firing from the sagged-open door.

He was probably waiting there now for McGrath to cross a break in the timber. McGrath stopped, drew his revolver, and pumped bullets at the door. He crossed the opening, firing once as he went.

The cabin had been built a considerable time before, and brush had grown up until it buried the rear. McGrath worked his way through this brush, reached the wall, moved on, stooping so he would not reveal himself at the tiny window on the south side.

He turned the corner and was within long arm's reach of the door.

A bullet tore splinters and fragments of mud from beneath his arm. It seemed to explode from the log wall. Kampen had tried to shoot him through a hole in the chinking.

McGrath reached the door and spun inside, leveling his gun. It was dark. Too dark to see anything. He collided with Kampen as his revolver roared. They struggled blindly across the dirt floor.

He flung Kampen back. The light from the door fell on them then, and McGrath saw that the automatic was no longer in the man's hand. It was probably empty and thrown away.

Kampen laughed with his breath in McGrath's face.

"You always were a coward, Mountie! You always were afraid to face me without a gun."

McGrath jerked his gun hand free, hesitated a moment, then flung his revolver outside in the snow.

The action made words unnecessary. Kampen smiled grimly, his mind going back to that fight at the trading post. It was too good to believe. He had never expected McGrath would turn out to be such a fool.

"I have to admire your guts, McGrath!"

"Thanks!"

The quarters were very small. No room for maneuvering. And that, in Kampen's mind, was all to the good. He knew several things that worked well in close quarters. He decided to break this fellow first. He would let him know what it meant to cross a man like himself, and then, of course, he would kill him.

Kampen had killed men before with his bare hands. There was something about such killing that was more satisfying than just pulling a trigger.

He said, "We can't do much dressed in parkas, Mountie. Let's take 'em off."

He started to strip his parka from his shoulders. He was so big, and the ceiling so low, that there was hardly room for it. McGrath made the movements of drawing his off, too.

Kampen bent suddenly, swinging his right fist. He expected to find McGrath tangled in his garment, but he was fooled. McGrath knew well enough what was coming. He rode out the blow, set his heels, and drove his fist to the pit of Kampen's stomach.

Kampen grunted, and his lips twisted from pain. He slammed another blow, and McGrath countered. He tried to grapple, but McGrath backed from the door.

The deep snow prevented much footwork. It was a bruising, toe-to-toe battle for a while, with Kampen at a disadvantage. Despite his size, he was no boxer.

His face was being slit from McGrath's chopping fists.

He stepped back, spitting blood from mashed lips, then lowered his head and charged forward, flailing his arms. McGrath swung a right to the button, and Kampen's head snapped back. He flung his arms, falling backward. He was not hurt that badly. It was another of his York crew tricks, and McGrath knew it.

Kampen hit the snow, and his feet swung in a sudden, vicious arc to tangle McGrath around the knees for a rolling toe-hold. It was a hold which had won Kampen many a bloody battle—a roll, the toe-hold, a quick, deft twist, and the foot would hang in a mass of splintered bones.

But McGrath was not where he expected. Instead of trying to escape, McGrath had leaped in, swinging a mukluk to Kampen's jaw.

Kampen's head snapped. He was a trifle groggy. He rolled over, trying to wrap his arms around McGrath's knees. McGrath sidestepped, bent, seized the big man by his hair, and rolled with him, driving his head into the logs of the cabin.

AN ordinary man would have been unconscious after a jolt like that, but Kampen pulled himself to all fours and looked up with bloodshot eyes like a wounded bull moose. He seemed about to come in another charge, but his eyes caught sight of the revolver butt sticking from the snow. He pounced on it. McGrath came forward, but Kampen did not try to fend him off. He aimed, and squeezed the trigger.

The gun snapped. Empty. Kampen cursed and tried to snap the double-action again, but McGrath struck him in the chest with both feet.

Kampen managed to stagger up, trying to suck air into his paralyzed lungs. McGrath measured him for a left. The big man's rolling eyes saw the blow, but he was unable to lift an arm to fend it off. It clopped into his jaw, and he staggered back, rebounding from the cabin wall.

"No! No!" he gasped, blood trickling from the corners of his mouth.

A right followed, and Kampen slid down the log wall, his eyes blank and strangely staring.

McGrath found his handcuffs inside and snapped them on Kampen's wrists.

He rested in the cabin, waiting for Jinks and Rene who would surely be trailing him.

In an hour they came through the timber with the dog string, and John Black in handcuffs.

Black stopped half way across the clearing and pointed at Kampen.

"He's guilty. I never did a thing except under his orders. I been a victim of circumstances . . ."

Kampen sat back against the rough logs of the cabin and cursed his former lieutenant through battered lips.

Rene said something and ran to McGrath. She hid her face against the buckskin of his parka for a moment, and then she looked up, her lips smiling, but her dark eyes, no longer mysterious, sparkled with tears.

"You thought I was a goner," he said.

"No, Philip. You are of the mounted police, and everyone knows the mounted police are never beaten."

"Except by a woman!"

McGrath noticed that Jinks was staring at them. He shouted.

"Special Constable Harney, stop eavesdropping on your superior, and take charge of the two prisoners!"

"Yes *sir!*" cried Jinks, coming to attention.

An hour later, on their way up the valley of the Noire, Kampen snarled.

"McGrath, you knew that damned gun of yours was empty when you tossed it away!"

McGrath grinned as he trotted along, one hand steadying the gee-pole.

"Sure. That's an old police trick. You York boat men should learn it sometime!"

FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES A Fiction House Magazine FICTION HOUSE MAGAZINES

HOT OFF THE PRESS!

TALES THAT MALES LOVE TO READ IN BED!

COLLECTED FROM MAN'S BEST PRIVATE LIBRARIES!

You may have to answer to your wife for devoting all your attention to this book . . . but it's well worth it! We will wager you won't know where to start reading this big, brand new, collection of seemingly inexhaustible, spicy entertainment. Ed Fitzgerald, well-known book critic to radio audiences, gathered this collection of hard-to-find tales from the far corners of man's best private libraries.

WHY MEN DON'T LEAVE HOME!

We are warning you! Don't be too shocked when you receive this irresistible incentive to stay home nights. Packed closer than sardines with unusual, rare viewpoints on the one subject that always steals the show—WOMEN! As you enjoy this luxury of reading in bed, living through these gay inviting bedside stories, you will just hate to turn out the lights. These escapes from boredom are vividly portrayed! You can't help feeling that you're a witness to these experiences that expose women in their true light!

SEND NO MONEY!

Don't send a cent! We invite you to read this book for 10 nights, . . . and days, too, at our expense. Just fill in and mail the coupon, the "open sesame" to one of the few joys bequeathed to the male sex. Just deposit with postman on delivery $1.98 plus postage. After 10 days of impartial appraisal, you must decide this book is worth not $1.98 but $198.00 in fun and thrills or your MONEY BACK GUARANTEED! Mail coupon now

YOU WON'T KNOW WHERE TO BEGIN WITH THESE CONTENTS OF "TALES FOR MALES"

- THE LOVE KICK *William Saroyan*
- MY VIEWS ON MARRIAGE *W. C. Fields*
- HE WAS SO GOOD TO HER *Frank Sullivan*
- WHAT EVERY YOUNG WIFE SHOULD KNOW *James Thurber*
- BUNDLING: AN OLD YANKEE CUSTOM *G. S. Chappell*
- WHAT GOES ON IN LADIES REST ROOMS *C. A. Hamilton*
- I LEARN SOMETHING ABOUT SEX *Corey Ford*
- LOVE LETTERS OF SMITH *H. C. Bunner*
- STRIP TEASE *George Weller*
- FASHIONS IN LOVE *Clarence Day, Jr.*
- LOVE, OR HOW TO WOO AND WIN A WOMAN *J. Goodman and A. Green*

. . . and these are only the beginning, gentlemen . . . for there's plenty more inside!

CADILLAC PUBLISHING CO., Inc., Dept. F-208, 220 Fifth Ave., New York 1, N. Y.

FREE! of extra charge "DAMES are DANGEROUS"

What Men Should Really Know About Women!

For a short time only, this divulging book "DAMES ARE DANGEROUS" will be given absolutely free of extra charge with your order of "TALES FOR MALES." Just off the Press! This book of hilarious intimate revelations is now released to the public for the first time! These most enlightening views on the dangerous, enchanting side of women will open your eyes! It rips the mask off their fair faces! Yes, you'll wonder why they were ever known as the modest, weaker sex. Remember, men—fore-warned is forearmed! While our limited supply holds out, we advise you to grab this added treat immediately! Mail coupon NOW!

FREE GIFT and 10 DAY TRIAL COUPON!

CADILLAC PUBLISHING CO., Inc., Dept. F-208
220 Fifth Ave., New York 1, N. Y.

Rush to me "TALES FOR MALES" plus the free book "Dames Are Dangerous" in plain wrapper. I will deposit with postman on delivery $1.98 plus postage. If after 10 days, I am not completely delighted my money will be refunded.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY & ZONE.....STATE.....

☐ If you wish to save postage, enclose with coupon only $1.98. Same money back guarantee.

Canada Orders—No C.O.D.—Send $2.50.

What's My Job?—I Manufacture Weaklings into MEN!

GIVE ME a skinny, pepless, second-rate body—and I'll cram it so full of handsome, bulging new muscle that your friends will grow bug-eyed! . . . I'll wake up that sleeping energy of yours and make it hum like a high-powered motor! Man, you'll ***feel*** and ***look*** different! You'll begin to ***LIVE!***

Charles Atlas

Actual Photograph of the man who holds the title "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

Let Me Make YOU a NEW MAN —IN JUST 15 MINUTES A DAY!

You wouldn't believe it, but I myself used to be a 97-lb. weakling. Fellows called me "Skinny." Girls snickered and made fun of me behind my back. I was a flop. THEN I discovered my marvelous new muscle-building system—*"Dynamic Tension."* And it turned me into such a *complete* specimen of MANHOOD that today I hold the title "THE WORLD'S MOST PERFECTLY DEVELOPED MAN."

That's how I traded in my "bag of bones" for a barrel of muscle! And I felt so much better, so much *on top of the world* in my big, new, husky body, that I decided to devote my whole life to helping *other* fellows change themselves into "perfectly developed men."

What Is "Dynamic Tension"? How Does It Work?

When you look in the mirror and see a healthy, husky, strapping fellow smiling back at you—then you'll be astounded at how *short* a time it takes *"Dynamic Tension"* to GET RESULTS!

"Dynamic Tension" is the easy, NATURAL method you can practice in the privacy of your own room—JUST 15 MINUTES EACH DAY—while your scrawny shoulder muscles begin to swell, ripple . . . those spindly arms and legs of yours bulge . . . and your whole body starts to feel "alive," full of zip and go!

One Postage Stamp May Change Your Whole Life!

As I've pictured up above, I'm steadily building broad-shouldered, dynamic MEN—day by day—the country over.

2,000,000 fellows, young and old, have already gambled a postage stamp to ask for my FREE book. They wanted to read and see for themselves how I'm building up scrawny bodies, and how I'm paring down fat, flabby ones—how I'm turning them into breath-taking human dynamos of real MANPOWER.

Take just a few seconds NOW to fill in and mail the coupon at right, and you will receive at once my FREE book—"Everlasting Health and Strength" that PROVES with actual snap-shots what *"Dynamic Tension"* has done for others—what it can do for YOU! Address: CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 312F. 115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

FREE

Mail the coupon below *right now* for my FREE illustrated book, "Everlasting Health and Strength." Tells all about *"Dynamic Tension"* methods. Crammed with pictures, facts! Address me personally: CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 312F, 115 E. 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

MAIL COUPON—NOW—FOR FREE BOOK

CHARLES ATLAS, Dept. 312F,
115 East 23rd St., New York 10, N. Y.

I want the proof that your system of *"Dynamic Tension"* will help make a New Man of me—give me a healthy, husky body and big muscular development. Send me your free book, "Everlasting Health and Strength."

Name.....
(Please print or write plainly)

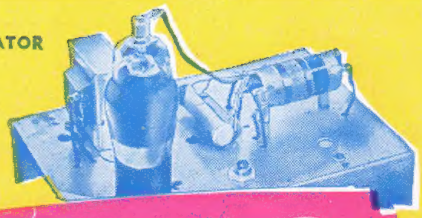
Address.....

City.....*Zone No. (if any)*.....*State*.....

☐ *Check here if under 16 for Booklet A.*

RADIO SERVICING pays good money for full time work. Many others make $5, $10 a week **EXTRA** fixing Radios in spare time.

Building this A. M. SIGNAL GENERATOR gives you valuable experience. Provides amplitude-modulated signals for test and experiment purposes.



Learn RADIO by PRACTICING in Spare Time

You build this MEASURING INSTRUMENT yourself early in the course—use it for practical Radio work on neighborhood Radios to pick up EXTRA spare time money!

You build this SUPERHETERODYNE CIRCUIT that brings in local and distant stations. You get *practical* experience putting this set through fascinating tests.

with 6 Big Kits of Radio Parts I Send You

Let me send you facts about rich opportunities in Radio. See how knowing Radio can give you security, a prosperous future. Send the coupon for FREE 64-page book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." Read how N.R.I. trains you at home. Read how you practice building, testing, repairing Radios with SIX BIG KITS of parts I send you.

Future for Trained Men Is Bright in Radio, Television, Electronics

The Radio Repair business is booming NOW. There is good money fixing Radios in your spare time or own full time business. Trained Radio Technicians also find good pay opportunities in Police, Aviation, Marine Radio, in Broadcasting, Radio Manufacturing, Public Address work, etc. Think of the boom coming now that new Radios can be made! Think of even *greater* opportunities when Television and Electronics are available.

Many Beginners Soon Make $5, $10 a Week EXTRA in Spare Time

The day you enroll I start sending EXTRA MONEY JOB SHEETS to help you make EXTRA money fixing Radios in spare time while learning. You LEARN Radio principles from my easy-to-grasp Lessons — PRACTICE what you learn by building real Radio Circuits with Radio parts I send—USE your knowledge to make EXTRA money in spare time.

Mail Coupon for Free Copy of Lesson and 64-Page Illustrated Book

I will send you FREE a sample lesson, "Getting Acquainted with Receiver Servicing," to show you how practical it is to train for Radio in spare time. With it I'll send my 64-page, illustrated book, "Win Rich Rewards in Radio." Just mail coupon in an envelope or paste it on a penny postal. **J. E. Smith, President, Dept. 6HG, National Radio Institute, *Pioneer Home Study Radio* School, Washington 9, D. C.**

My Course Includes Training in TELEVISION • ELECTRONICS

BE A SUCCESS in RADIO I Will Train You at Home

Sample Lesson FREE

Gives hints on Receiver Servicing, Locating Defects, Repair of Loudspeakers, I. F. Transformer, Gang Tuner, Condenser, etc., 31 illustrations. Study it—keep it—*use* it—without obligation! Mail coupon NOW for your copy!

GET BOTH 64 PAGE BOOK SAMPLE LESSON FREE

MR. J. E. SMITH, President, Dept. 6HG
National Radio Institute, Washington 9, D. C.

Mail me FREE, without obligation, Sample Lesson and 64-page book about how to win success in Radio. (No salesman will call. Please write plainly.)

Name..... Age.....

Address .....

City..... Zone.... State.... ..4FR

( ) If you are a war veteran, check here.